Oscar Browning and the making of popular history : education, identity and Empire in Britain, 1878-1912

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Introduction

> What history is best worth teaching at schools? And what is the best method of teaching history in schools? (6)
>
> - Oscar Browning, *The Teaching of History in Schools*

At the end of the nineteenth century, from 1860 onwards, the world of education in Great Britain underwent several significant changes under the impulse of, and consonant with, new socio-economic conditions and political imperatives. The demographic growth of Britain went hand in hand with a growing literacy rate among the British people: a new audience for printed matter was found and needed supply, fostering the development of newspapers and underlining the importance of knowing how to read. Simultaneously, a renewed sense of class consciousness among the working class, linked to the advent of an extended franchise, prompted an urgent response from the Establishment. As historians have remarked elsewhere,[1] the necessity to contain the danger represented by the working class required a close regulation of their manners, leisure activities and ideological affiliations, especially as the growing urban layers of society were concerned. Elementary education was one of the means of social control, as it entailed socialization, i.e., the "developmental processes whereby each person acquires the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions which enable him of her to function as a more or less effective. . . member of society" (Stacey 2). In the preparation of future citizens to their duties, the question of the "nation" and the citizen's behaviour towards it came up prominently. As Paulo Freire puts it,[2] "All educational practice implies a theoretical stance on the educator's part. This stance implies—sometimes more, sometimes less explicitly—an interpretation of man and the world." Working from this premise—that education may involve and prescribe a particular set of relationships, made up of socially-constructed values between the individual and his surroundings, in this case his country—I shall examine basic historical instruction in Britain from the 1870s onwards, and some history readers and textbooks written during the period by a Cambridge don, Oscar Browning, to try and retrieve their underlying theoretical stance. For as far as state-sanctioned education in elementary schools in this period is concerned, its purpose was to pass on

1 See Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*: "The need for state and ruling classes to compete with rivals for the loyalty of the lower orders . . . became acute" (83).

2 Qtd. in Luke (18).

acceptance of the dominant social structure and of its core values: obedience, a sense of duty and of national allegiance (Heathorn 9-11). The materials often used to this end in elementary schools, because they were cheap and because they also tallied with the imperative to teach the "three Rs" (reading, writing, and arithmetic), were common reading books, or readers, that formed the staple of everyday instruction.[3]

Popular history for the people

However straightforward this might seem, ideological prescriptions in reader sets stood under constant scrutiny, mirroring the multifarious debates surrounding education in different circles: the content as much as the methods of transmission were widely discussed on the political scene, but also in universities and other educational circles, among the professions that were directly affected by it: teachers, headmasters, local school boards, HMIs (Her Majesty's Inspectors), as well as in the commercial market of education, where publishers followed every change of educational policy with great attention and pressured their authors into complying with official requirements. What was to be taught to young children of the working class? Who decided what to publish, and how was it to be transmitted? The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the human interactions that shaped historical readers and popular textbooks, shedding light on the individuals operating behind the scene of official instruction. They indeed offer a fascinating insight into how theories of instruction and educational practices circulated from one sphere to the next, and how they were transformed at a time when elementary education came at the top of the political agenda.

By choosing to focus on the history of Britain and of its colonies, I shall try to unveil the ideological subtext at work within the accounts of the birth of Britain, the growth of its empire, and in the telling of unexpected challenges to authority. Instead of considering the world of elementary education only, this focus on history will also enable me to consider its link to higher education: in what sense, and how, could a discipline that slowly came to be taught to future leaders of the nation—"academic" history—also be transmitted to their future followers—"popular" history? What was meant behind the phrase "popular" history? The definition of the term here underlined is problematical, for it encompasses several layers of meaning: "prevalent or current among the general public; generally accepted, commonly known", but also "generated by the general public; democratic"; "of low birth; not noble; plebeian, ill-bred"; or "adapted to the means of ordinary people; low or moderate in price"

3 According to Tilleard, in 1860, 123 reading lesson books were inscribed on the list of the Committee of the Council of Education (compared to 55 for arithmetic and 4 for writing); it amounted to 902,926 copies ordered by around 3,800 schools (4)—see Table 1 in appendix.

and "liked or admired by many people" (*OED*, my selection). As we shall see in this study, the denotations of the word "popular", applied to history, illustrate many aspects of the material under study, and may explain a certain number of prescriptions and choices made about text content and format.

How imperialistic was the British people?

Aiming at the study of the transmission of knowledge about British history and especially about the British empire, I cannot escape from the question that raged in the field of the "new imperial history": what was the extent to which British domestic experience was affected by the advent of a new form of imperialism in the last third of the nineteenth century? The debate is of crucial importance to try to understand how everyday life and activities, including state-regulated education for the masses, were, or were not, influenced by a more acute consciousness of Britain's might and place in the world. Two schools of thought can be delineated in the debate: on the one hand, some historians, such as John M. MacKenzie and his influential "Studies in Imperialism series", initiated in the early 1980s a "maximalist" approach to the question of imperial influence. According to them, the empire played a determining part in shaping the life, ideas and cultural habits of domestic Britain, from the music hall to juvenile literature, government agencies, youth organisations and exhibitions. Their messages were supposedly laden with stereotypical images and rested on stories of racial difference, constructing an image of the empire along gender, class and ethnic lines which enhanced a typically English and white male superiority. But this view, here grossly summarized, happened to be challenged by the so-called school of minimalists, with Bernard Porter as its main exponent. In *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (2004), he acknowledged a change in Britain political culture from the 1870s onwards, which put a stronger emphasis on its Empire as a means of social cohesion: it "constituted a richer soil for the growth of domestic imperial sentiment than had existed before" (Porter 174). But blatant evidence of popular forms of imperialism does not tell how significant those forms really were for the everyday Briton. Instead, according to Bernard Porter, the working class remained impervious to any deeply-rooted sense of nationalist pride: "For them [the workers], the empire continued to be marginal. This cannot be known for certain, but the evidence – and particularly, the *lack* of evidence – is compelling. Even when the working classes behaved in an imperialistic way it was invariably for unimperialistic reasons" (*Absent-Minded* 208). Within the debate, both schools focused on education and its content, making the case for a propagandist view that supposedly pervaded every schoolbooks

and readers, especially those intended for elementary education (Horn 39-55; Mangan, "The Grit" 113-139; MacKenzie, "Imperialism" 173-197) or on the contrary playing down its importance (Porter, *Absent-Minded* 183-187). However, both schools recognise that scholarly disciplines such as history and geography acquired a particular prominence in the later decades of the century—a prominence to be linked to a certain extent to the new imperial spirit. They indeed both agree on a similar chronology of events, making of the period spanning between 1880 and 1914 a golden age of imperialism (Bensimon 23).

Contexts of production and rival discourses

Rather than trying to favour one of those two schools of thought's approach at the expense of accuracy, I intend here to follow Simon Potter's "agnosticism", involving "scepticism about whether Britain's imperial experience operated in a single, decisive direction" (Potter 64-65). This approach involves an increased and sustained attention to contexts, sources, discourses operating at the same time as imperialism (such as social Darwinism, humanitarianism, liberalism) and to the meshes of relationships that linked those who conceived the message education was meant to deliver, those who transmitted it via writing, printing, and marketing it, those who taught it and those who received it. It would indeed be naïve and dangerous to believe in a one-way imperialistic message. As I shall try to demonstrate, textbooks and readers were not solely irredeemable coercive instruments of domination, straightforwardly relaying ideas of the ruling class, for they were the products of dynamic and complex interactions. From the world of higher education in Cambridge, to the small, shabby classes of a school in Salford, or the London office of a successful educational publisher, from an essay on pedagogical theory to a political speech, the imperial message, if one acknowledges its existence, invariably came to be refashioned and adapted.

Oscar Browning, a jack-of-all-trades

The intertwining of those different spheres, each with their own specific interests and agenda, constitutes the backdrop of this study, as it was similarly the social and mental environment of Oscar Browning (1837–1923), a Cambridge historian and scholar whose acquaintance with politics and the world of education was very well-known at the time. However, he seems today to more remembered for his flamboyant character than for his scholarly achievements:

> He was blessed with talents of a high order—intelligence, charm, wit, stamina, a gift for friendship and a genuine love of youth—which ought to have given him real success in his chosen profession of teaching. At the same time he was cursed with equal and

> opposite defects—conceit, sloth, narrowness, insensitivity, a genius of upsetting people and an unpleasant homosexual appetite. Over and over again these got him into trouble and stopped him achieving the prizes his talent deserved. The needle on the balance swings back and forward violently between good and bad, and the problem for the biographer which these contradictions pose is formidable. (Anstruther, 189)

Oscar Browning was nonetheless considered as a prominent pedagogue and educationist, in the very sense defined by Pam Hirsch and Mark McBeth: "someone who studies the science of method of education, or is an advocate of education" (xii). But Oscar Browning did not only theorize about education; from 1860 to 1875, he was an assistant master at Eton, before his dismissal amid controversy on supposed charges of inefficiency. He then returned to King's College, Cambridge (where he had graduated) as a resident fellow. From 1875 onwards, he devoted himself to the teaching of history: he was a committed tutor and greatly contributed to the expansion of the history tripos at Cambridge. Loved by the undergraduate students, whom he invited to his Sunday social evenings, Oscar Browning never missed an occasion to participate in university life.[4] Among other activities, he created the Political Society, functioning on a seminar-like mode which provided students with very formative extra-curricular discussions on topics that related to Britain political and social life. Browning also obtained a college, then a university lectureship, and published throughout his career historical accounts, textbooks, history readers and many articles and essays on education, including a *History of Educational Theories* (1881) and one *Aspects of Education* (1888). Admittedly, he saw himself "as a professional educator rather than a professional historian" (Davenport-Hines). Frequently pushing for reform within the College, assuming the charge of secretary of the teachers' training syndicate (1879–1909), Oscar Browning supported the creation of the Cambridge University Day Training College and became its principal from its inception (1891-1909). This institution received students from working-class background to train them into being teachers, providing them with practical and theoretical knowledge on the subject.

As mentioned before, Oscar Browning's career seems to stand at the crossroads of many of the debates that ran through the world of education in Britain in the last third of the nineteenth-century: instruction for the masses, a changing pedagogy of education, the problematic rendering of history in resources directed to elementary school pupils and a popular audience, and the importance allotted to the history of the empire in readers and textbooks. For Oscar Browning was himself a prolific writer of such material: he authored

4 "Mr Oscar Browning is not so much one Don as the epitome of all Cambridge. . . so various are his abilities, so wide apart lie the fields in which his abounding energy revels" ('Those in Authority: Oscar Browning.' *The Granta* 3 May 1889: 9-10).

most notably a successful civic reader, *The Citizen: His Rights and Responsibilities*, published by Blackie in 1883, and a whole range of historical readers: Longmans' *Modern England, 1820 – 1875*, which appeared in 1878, *Historical Reader*, *True Stories from English History*, and *The Newbery Historical Reader*, all published by Griffith, Farran and Co. between 1884 and 1893, and *The Evolutionary History of England, Its People and Institutions* out in 1893, as a part of the set of readers called *Pitman's King Edward History Reader.* He similarly was the author of textbooks for older students and a wider audience: *The New Illustrated History of England*, published by J.S. Virtue in 1888, *A History of the Modern World*, published by Cassel and Co. in 1912.[5] For the sake of coherence, I will primarily focus on Browning's historical readers and textbooks, published between 1878 and 1912,[6] without refraining from alluding to other writings and addresses that are of particular interest for this study. Due to relentless financial problems (he had to support his sister and mother besides himself), Browning was indeed much obliged to live partly by his pen, and relied on the meagre revenues generated by publishing sales.

A borderline status

In drawing such a portrait of Oscar Browning, I shall highlight his "liminal" and puzzling position: an original, eccentric Cambridge don, close to his students and despised, sometimes openly, by his own colleagues; a first-class snob, claiming acquaintance with Queen Mary, striking a long-lasting friendship with George Curzon (Browning's protégé at Eton, later viceroy in India from 1899 to 1905), and yet capable of great understanding and respect for working-class students willing to become teachers; an advocate of liberal education for the elites and a writer for elementary school pupils. Probing further these apparent paradoxes will provide me with an interesting vantage point from which to assess the manner history was conceived and written for British elementary schools, while also enabling me to question the meaning of "popular history". In what sense were Browning's works "popular" and what ideological preconceptions does the term conceal? In what ways did these popular works relate to the "more serious" works of history written by Browning's Oxbridge peers? Were they really some mere instruments of a crude, state-prescribed propaganda? Most of all, how

5 The full references to these works can be found in the bibliography.

6 I have used the original editions for every text, apart from the 1893 revised edition of *The Newbury Historical Readers*, originally published by Griffith, Farran and Co. in 1884. Nevertheless, given the economic constraints faced by publishers, alterations to the text were not substantial, the original preface having been reproduced identically. For purposes of practicality, I have had recourse to abbreviated titles in quotations, i.e., *NHR* for *The Newbery Historical Readers*, *HMW* for *A History of the Modern World, TSEH* for *True Stories from English History*, *NIHE* for *The New Illustrated History of England*, and *PKEHR* for *Pitman's King Edward History Reader.*

did these works relate the story of the English nation and its identity, and how did the British Empire fit into this story?

I first intend to explore the political, cultural and pedagogical culture in which Oscar Browning wrote his texts, in order to underline his own location within it. In other words, I will study the advent of mass education and its framing as regards the political context of Great Britain, so as to provide a nuanced analysis of the history of history teaching and of the selection of content that was thought to be best fitting to young working-class children. Considering books as cultural artefacts compels us to draw a larger picture of the dominant culture whose vision they tended to legitimise, and to take into account those adjunct texts (teaching manuals, government circulars) that framed the conditions of literacy and history teaching.

Yet books were not only vehicles for ideas and ideology: they were produced for a market as economic goods aiming to become best sellers. In the course of this study, drawing on Browning's correspondence, I will thus discuss the involvement of five of his publishing houses in the process of composing, printing and marketing textbooks and history readers: Griffith, Farran and co.; Longmans, Green and co.; J.S. Virtue; Cassel and Co, and Pitman and Sons. I aim at unveiling the kind of prescriptions and arrangements that were part of the publication process, and which made of popular history a surprisingly collaborative work. I will endeavour to pin down Oscar Browning's own standpoint on his role as an author of works that were not intended for his usual privileged audience. In doing so, I shall make use of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual approach of the field of cultural production,[7] to analyse the relations of power entailed by Browning's equivocal position in the academic and publishing world.

The insight on the various agents involved in the making of history resources will lead me to text content, through a series of case studies based on Browning's writings, with particular attention to his historical readers—for they constituted the basis of all the future readings of working-class children. Covering the story of the English nation from its inception to more contemporary times, up to Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897), the focus is intended to demonstrate the potency of image constructions, myth-making and the force of simplification at work in historical narratives for young children aged from seven to thirteen. If these features do not overtly play in favour of a jingoistic version of British national history, it will be our task to try to assess their impact on those “citizens-on-the-making”. Indeed, even if I

7 See Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.

intend to focus primarily upon the intentions and representations at stake in the readers under study, and in spite of a blatant lack of evidence, one cannot escape from addressing the question of audience and text use, and from questioning the reception of works that were so minutely designed partly for reasons of social control.

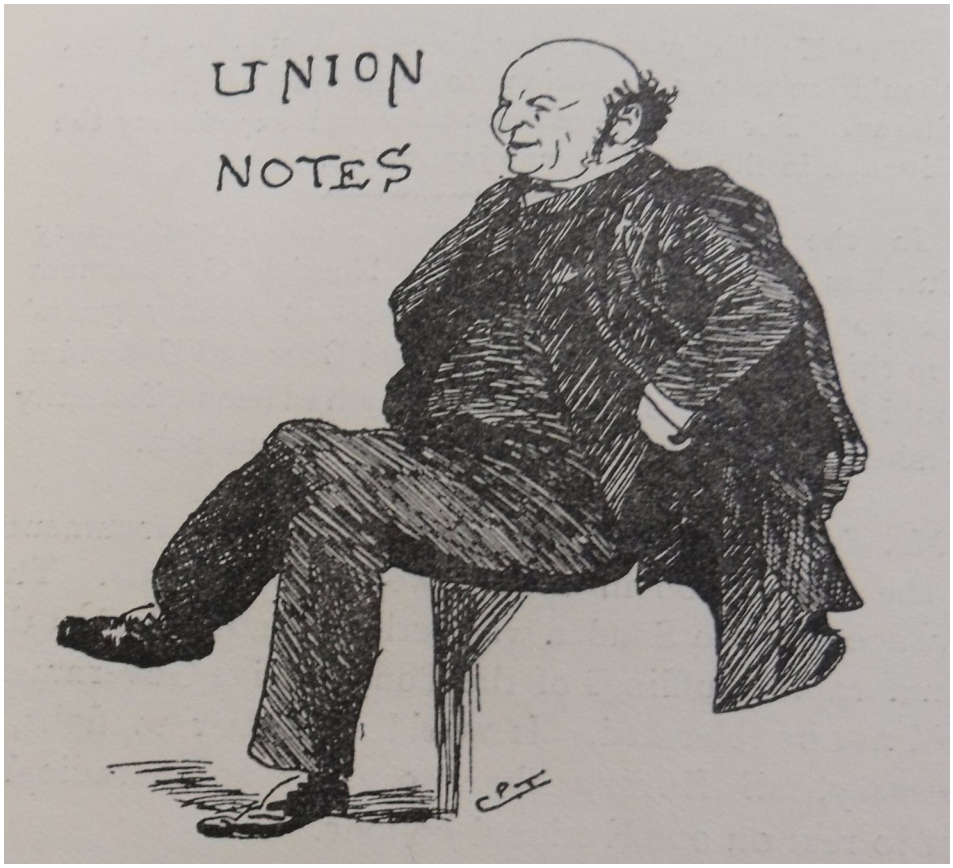

Illustration 1: Oscar Browning, portrayed in *The Granta*, the Cambridge undergraduate journal founded in 1889, and in the pages of which he was very often featured. *The Granta*, IX, 189 (6 June 1896:355).

CHAPTER ONE – Elementary school and the public educators

"Whatever we wish to see introduced in the life of a nation must be first introduced into its schools"

– Alexander Von Humboldt[8]

The idea of widespread education took time to be fully accepted by political, as well as educational authorities in Britain. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, resistance to education for the masses was common, as shown in the following statement made by the Tory MP Davies Giddy:

> However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would, in effect, be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them the virtue of subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as is evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors. (Hansard, House of Commons, Vol. 9, Col. 798, 13 June 1807, quoted in Gillard)

Later in the century, in November 1867, just as measures for mass education were once again discussed, MP C.S. Reed could declare in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* that

> Girls should stay in education until 11 or 12 because they were of little use for domestic or farm duties until that age, but if a boy could read at 9 years old, he should go to field labour and improve his education through evening and Sunday schools.[9]

The argument hinged on the ambiguities of education: was it not highly improper and risky to try to teach the children of the poor, in that they may then dream of another station in life? Was the endeavour not fostering social unrest instead of promoting a peaceful *status quo*? Those demurs, particularly pregnant during the Victorian era, came to be toned down at the turn of the twentieth century, with the advent of mass-education and a general trend towards a more encompassing democratic culture. A rigid framework dictating the sense of education was set up by the ruling class, so as to keep a tight control on those citizens-to-be—a concern nourished by contemporary fears about Britain's domestic life as well as international status. The sphere of the community at large, that of the nation, is indeed especially relevant in assessing the growing importance of education in Britain. I shall thus try to contextualize my

8 Qtd. in H.T. Mark (36).
9 Qtd. in Weedon (113).

source material, Browning's readers and textbooks, as regards Britain's contemporary attitude towards national belonging, citizenship and its imperialism[10] abroad. In doing so, I hope to avoid generalisations based on schematisation of meaning; I here understand the empire as "a large, diverse, geographically dispersed and expansionist political entity" which "'reproduces differentiation and inequality among people it incorporates" (Hall and Rose 5-6). At the end of the nineteenth century, as an imperial power covering a large part of the globe, Great Britain was thus shaped by political imperatives and strategies of domination abroad, which in turn had an impact on its society and the education of its population.

I. "Struggles for existence"[11] and strategies of survival

An acute perception of Britain's threatened place on the world stage can be sensed both in elite discourses and popular media after 1875. The end of the nineteenth century was indeed marked by the growing feeling that Britain as a world empire was being slowly, but surely, superseded by new powers on the global scene, thus requiring the involvement of all forces, including teachers and their pupils.[12] Simultaneously, the country faced a number of challenges coming from its own very colonies and their borders.

A spurt of aggressive imperialism

In his memoir published in 1938, F.H. Spencer (born in 1872), a retired chief inspector who came from a humble background,[13] remembered the 1880s decade in those terms: "We always took the Daily News at home, and a newspaper was worth reading then, for it was 1884-5-6 and things were happening. There was the Franchise, and the Soudan!" (sic—114). The expression of thrilled excitement at play in the interjection is highly interesting. It first acknowledges the influence of the press and the role played by printed matter in the circulation of news about the empire. It also intertwines an imperial event with a domestic matter, placing them on the same level of interest, as two historical occurrences worthy of remembrance. Retrospectively, the last three decades of the century were indeed an age of considerable external and internal changes. On the foreign front, first, the period tallied with a

10 For the sake of clarity, I shall here follow Catherine Hall's definition of "imperialism": "the process of empire building. It is a project that originates in the metropolis and leads to domination and control over the peoples and lands of the periphery . . . The process of colonisation involves the takeover of a particular territory, appropriation of its resources and, in the case of the British Empire, the migration of people from the metropole outward to administer or to inhabit the colony as settlers" (Hall and Rose 6-7).

11 Porter (*The Lion's Share* 105).

12 See Paris: "From the 1890s, the British became obsessed with the problems of national and imperial defence" (83) and Searle: "The insecurity and defensiveness of mind underlying so much of the rhetoric about Britain's 'imperial mission' manifested itself even more obviously in the public debate about the state of the economy, which accompanied the Great Depression of 1873-1896" (11).

13 He was the son of a factory worker.

critical moment for the British government, forced to be more thoroughly involved on the borders of and within its empire than before—from the Ashanti campaign in 1874, to the Afghanistan and Zulu wars of 1879, the troubles in Egypt and Sudan, and the difficulties in South Africa, to quote only a few of these difficulties. As fewer and fewer "empty" territories were left for the taking by European powers, Britain found itself faced with the threat of foreign encroachment and overseas competition. This did not fail to attract Oscar Browning's attention, who hailed the 1875 purchase of the Suez Canal shares as "one of the most fortunate and most sensational pieces of business which have ever occurred in British history" (*A History of The Modern World* 2:310). The over-emphasis given by the two superlatives reads like an unconditional admiration and agreement with the government's action. Yet in the 1870s—Browning publishing his textbook in 1912—some remained wary of such developments: according to the *Manchester Guardian*, "It is not the habit of the English people to set out with their eyes open on a career of conquest and annexation. The conquests which we make are forced upon us".[14] The formulation of such a self-defensive plea remained nonetheless ambiguous. It hinged on Seeley's famous assertion, that "We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind" (12), meaning that no set political design had led Britain's expansion, which had taken place among a widespread disinterest from the British people. As remarked by Bernard Porter (*The Lion's Share* 116), the seemingly innocent line of defence tended to surreptitiously legitimize conquest in the name of inevitability and response to foreign aggression; on Seeley's part, it was a call to revive consciousness and awareness of the Empire, if not direct involvement in it. Looking back to the troubles encountered in Egypt in the 1880s, Oscar Browning adopted a similar rhetoric in blaming the government of the time: "Great Britain made the serious mistake, which she is now expiating, of not assuming boldly the responsibility *which circumstances had laid upon her, and of which she could not divest herself*" (*A History of the Modern* World 2:357—my emphasis). In spite of such a reluctance, the last decades of the century witnessed a burst of the imperial spirit in the ruling classes. It seemed to coincide with what Hobsbawm identified as the advent of nationalism and its "invented traditions" in Europe ("Introduction" 1-7), with the inauguration of practices in the name of a new national inclusive culture. In Britain particularly, this nationalistic discourse got to be associated with the empire and with a resurgence of popularity of the monarchy (Cannadine 124). Imperialism became a political tool to face potential disunity and social unrest, as shown by Disraeli, a proponent of an assertive international policy, when in 1877, as a Prime Minister, he added to the titles of

14 7 April 1884, qtd. in Porter (*The Lion's Share* 116).

Queen Victoria that of “Empress of India”. The pageantry of Victoria's two Jubilees, in 1887 and 1897, which granted an unprecedented place to the colonies, seemed also to testify to the strength of the imperial spirit, with its share of encomiums and its “bouts of popular excitement” (Mackenzie, “Introduction” 3). On the Diamond Jubilee (1897), Browning thus exclaimed: “The Jubilee celebrations, indeed, constituted the high-water mark of colonial loyalty and of the manifestation of the qualities and the unity of the Empire.” Displaying the unity between “every part of the great political body” and “the free heart of the Mother Country”, the event symbolised “an object-lesson in Home Rule”, with indeed a moral to be drawn from it: “that neglect and ignorance of this [the spirit of self-government and liberty] would mean ruin and decay” (*A History of the Modern World* 2:492). Still lurking behind the self-confidence, one may sense the need to reassure oneself of Britain’s importance, and to prevent its much feared decline. One might even argue that those bombastic statements and showy acts of bravado were, after all, not the mark of actual power but signs pointing towards its wane. Browning’s conclusion itself seemed to mirror a more widespread feeling of doom and anxiety about the state of Britain's might.

National self-doubt

The defensiveness to be sensed in Britain's more assertive, aggressive policy when confronted with European competition, interlocked with a concomitant sense of insecurity as regards her supremacy. The final decades of the nineteenth century indeed tallied with a critical period of national self-questioning, triggered by economic slump and diplomatic isolation. As early as 1881, Germany, the USA, and Russia were identified as the new rivals to England's pre-eminence by the Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, John Seeley, in two courses of lectures which he later published (1883) under the title *The Expansion of England*. It is significant that these highly successful lectures should focus on the two themes that seemed to dominate British political culture at the time: the British Empire, and the nation's supposed decline. It is worth quoting Seeley extensively here. A loss of its colonies

> would leave Britain on the same level as the states nearest to us on the Continent, populous, but less so than Germany and scarcely equal to France. But two states, Russia and the United States, would be on an altogether higher scale of magnitude, Russia having at once, and the United States perhaps before very long, twice our population. Our trade would be much exposed to wholly new risks.
>
> The other alternative is, that England may prove able to do what the United States does so easily, that is, hold together in a federal union countries very remote from each other. In that case England will rank with Russia and the United States in the first rank of state,

> measured by population and area, and in a higher rank than the states of the Continent. (18-19)

The obsession of the "rank" of Britain, which imbues so pregnantly Seeley's writings, powerfully translates the context of national self-doubts that permeated British politics. In the later decades of the nineteenth-century, the country indeed experienced a period of economic slump which deeply shook its confidence. The Great Depression (from 1876 to 1896) was a first tax on the country's vitality: records of Germany's and the US performances in industry, closely following, if not already surpassing Britain's, seemed to put an end to the nation's advance that had been acquired thanks to the Industrial Revolution (Searle 13). The disastrous Boer War, from 1898 to 1902, further undermined the country's claim at world leadership: "national complacency received a severe jolt from which it never fully recovered" (34). Faced with this moment of national crisis, some men, be they politicians or ideologues, undertook to draw a plan of recovery in which every one needed to have a share. The ideology of "national efficiency" put a strong emphasis on imperialism, as a means of fostering national pride, and sought to bear down on the education every young Britons received. Drill and military exercise to improve the physique of the nation—a feature that had been so lacking in every respect during the Boer War, and which had a clear influence on the creation of the Boy Scouts by Boar War veteran Baden Powell in 1907—a new emphasis on technical training, copied on the German model, and a pervading discourse of race struggle and racial supremacy that took inspiration from social Darwinism: these different characteristics constituted the tenets of the creed of national efficiency (Searle 54-75). It was given a neat formulation by the journal editor and scientist Norman Lockyer, in his *Education and National Progress* (1906):

> It is a struggle between organised species—nations—not between individuals or any class of individuals. It is, moreover, a struggle in which science and brains take the place of swords and sinews . . . The schools, the University, the laboratory and the workshop are the battlefield of this new warfare. (177-178)

In a striking warlike stance, Lockyer emphasized the close association of education and the good health of the nation. Similarly, Richard B. Haldane, another of national efficiency's "foremost apostle[s]" (Searle 33) seemed embarked on the quasi-messianic mission of placing education at the heart of his contemporaries' concerns. In the preface to his telling collection of essays and articles, entitled *Education and Empire* (1902), he thus stated:

> Today, at the beginning of the twentieth century, we as a nation have to face the problem of preserving our great commercial position, and with it the great empire which the great men of past generations have won and handed down to us. That empire it is our duty to hold as a sacred trust, and to pass on in such a fashion that those who come after may be proud of us, as we are proud of the forefathers who did their work before our time.

(Haldane vii-viii)

The grand rhetoric of duty and reverence at work in those few sentences was nothing rare or innovative: in textbooks and readers, as we shall see, the call for contemporary Britons to maintain the empire as bequeathed by the glorious deeds of their predecessors went hand in hand with the sacred, quasi-religious exaltation of this task. Elaborating on this idea, Haldane went on to warn his contemporaries about their lack of interest and involvement with the empire. A full consequence of this had to be drawn as regards education:

> Not only elementary education in this country, but our secondary and tertiary systems must be thoroughly overhauled and co-ordinated if we are to be brought near to the existing levels of Germany, and that to which the United States are rapidly approaching. (Haldane ix)

Practically speaking, for the exponents of national efficiency, such a programme meant a remodelling of English educational system on Germany's supposedly superior training, with its orientation towards the commercial and technical world. But what about the meaning and ideas that education was supposed to convey to elementary school pupils? Here again, a look at some prominent educationists' writings must be taken:

> In the development of individual character and intelligence, the more room we can leave for spontaneous action the better; but when we are members of a community, the healthy corporate life of that community requires of us an abnegation of self. . . Everyone among us is called, as citizen, as member of a council or municipality, or public company, to work with others towards ends which require unity of action, and which are incompatible with the assertion of our individual rights. It is then for this class of duties that school should in some measure prepare every child. (Fitch 98)

In J. G. Fitch's prose, the multifarious binary constructions that balance the individual to the community, the adversative “but” that enhances the primacy of the collective over the personal, as well as the vivid images given as examples of participation into society (be it political, or civil) illustrated the holistic view held by many: the individual's development was not seen as important in its own right, but precisely because this individual was going to be a part, however slight, of a social, more coherent whole. In Richard D. Altick's words, this translated as follows:

> In the age's educational theory, as in its theory of humanitarianism generally, a man or woman of the masses was regarded solely as an atom of society, not as a person. The function of reform was to strengthen the English social structure, not to enrich people's intellectual or emotional lives. (143)

More than knowledge for its own sake then, those texts sought to emphasize the pre-eminence of moral values and the importance of citizenship as moulding responsible subjects: this was the major concern of the significant output of the “new education movement” that

dominated the 1890s (Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 29). The perceived feeling of a new national ordeal subsequently led to a re-examination of the quality of its citizens: and "in this need for the cultivation and strengthening of work-power and character-power (which includes good citizenship) the nation looks to its schools" (Mark 39). If there remains little doubt about what school instruction was considered to be about in times of national crisis, what form did this discourse of nationalism and nation-building take in the world of higher education—meaning primarily Oxford and Cambridge—that constituted Oscar Browning's, and many other textbook authors' direct background?

The rallying of the elites

The flurry of imperialist activity managed to wind its way into the spheres of higher education, all the more easily since it stemmed from the political classes that had been educated in those same universities after attending public schools. Those schools' ethos taught scholars service to the state and qualities of leadership, while their systems of examination, devised and sanctioned by college teachers, offered access to public careers in the Home Office or the newly established Civil Service of India (Soffer, "The Modern University" 166-169). Very little, or no criticism at all was directed against the institutions of the empire, and in Oscar Browning's 1912 textbook, it translated into the Civil Service of India being praised as "the most efficient, the most intelligent and the purest bureaucracy in the world" (2:257). The apologetic and unrestrained tone of admiration needs to be highlighted, for what usually dominated in pedagogical materials, especially those aimed at a broader audience than simply students, as was the case for this textbook, was a uniformity of style that supposedly reflected neutrality of content. During the writing of *A History of the Modern World,* it was indeed brought several times to Browning's attention that he had to cut up passages and "tone [others] down"[15] because of their bias. One instance of that was a reference to Lord A. J. Balfour, originally described by Browning as the "purest and brightest spirits who ever took part in political life"—a reference which his editor asked him to suppress.[16] Arthur James Balfour, who had attended Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, was no stranger to Browning. They used to exchange letters on historical matters (Anstruther 106-107) and Browning knew A. J. Balfour's younger brother very well, as one of his protégés at Cambridge. Normally, the ordinary policy of publishers (for this was also the case for other publishing houses than Cassel and Co.) in terms of content and tone was the avoidance of any

15 Cassel and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 16 January 1912. MS OB/1/320/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

16 Cassel and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 13 February 1912. MS OB/1/320/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

kind of partisanship or collusion due, in Browning's case, to former acquaintances: for Cassel's chief editor, "the statement is not one that should figure in an important and well-balanced historical work" (*ibid*.). As far as the reference to the Civil Service was concerned, it was one that Browning evidently fully endorsed, for most of his Eton and Cambridge students, including some attending his Political Society's meetings, undertook careers in the higher civil service. He additionally read and published a public plea in favour of a deeper involvement of universities in the training of those public servants, in "the chief branches of the public service, diplomacy, the foreign office, the Indian civil service, the home civil service" (*The Training by Universities* 1). No other kind of men could possibly face the great challenges of his present day:

> Our diplomatic service, our foreign office has need of the best educated and the acutest minds to understand and control the forces of the age. If the centre of gravity of politics has shifted from the rivalries and struggles of individuals to the conflict of more massive powers, the new problems thus engendered require greater skill and knowledge for their just solution. (8)

Closely linked to the Indian Civil Service was for instance George Curzon, whom Browning met at Eton and for whom he conceived a life-long attachment. Their correspondence went on even when Browning got dismissed from Eton—in fact, their intimate friendship was one of the causes of Browning's disgrace. Later Viceroy of India, Curzon invited Browning to India—a trip from which the Cambridge don drew his *Impressions of an Indian Travel* (1903). In this personal account, the terms Browning employed to describe British rule in India are very similar to those used in the 1912 textbook: the Indian Civil Service was "the most perfectly wise and virtuous bureaucracy which the world has ever seen. Those who travel in India find Englishmen and Englishwomen at their very best" (233). In his case, the empire was thus a tangible reality and a familiar *locus* of power peopled with some of his very own students. Where neutrality demanded the erasure of personal opinions, his idiosyncratic, over-enthusiastic tone took over to deal with a familiar setting. We can sense in it what Michael Billig has described as "banal nationalism": a mundane and mindless world view of the nation's power—mindless as opposed to "mindful"—so imbued within one's thoughts that it is taken for granted without questioning, a modern *doxa* by virtue of which "the nation is indicated, or "flagged" in the lives of its citizenry" (6). It is also a blatant example of the way Browning was fully aware of the politics of his day (he ran unsuccessfully for the Liberals in three general elections), here through the intermediary of his former students.

As a historian and scholar, he was also far from promoting learning for its own sake—or, to put it in the terms of the debate, he opposed the research ideal in historical studies defended at Cambridge by Adolphus Ward—an ideal that privileged research as the investigation of facts and defended a "pure" vision of history, remaining aloof from any practical, i.e. political application (Kitson Clark 540). In this, he followed John Seeley, the Regius Professor of Modern History from 1869 to 1895, who had made it clear in his inaugural address that his main aim was to consider history as "the school of public feeling and patriotism . . . the school of statesmanship",[17] i.e. as a vocational training for future politicians and a useful knowledge for mundane citizens:

> I tell you that when you study English history you study not the past of England only, but her future. It is the welfare of your country, it is your whole interest as citizens, that is in question while you study history. (*The Expansion of England* 201-202)

A follower of Seeley in the debate around history's object, Browning also defended this conception of the discipline as a political science. He emphasized the position in his memoir, *Memories of Sixty Years at Eton, Cambridge and Elsewhere*:

> I was now able to devote myself to a task, which I had long looked forward to, the training of statesmen by academical instruction. In this I had the full sympathy of Seeley, who had indeed founded the Historical Tripos with that particular view. His opinion was, that in order to be effective it should not be a Tripos of historical erudition or research so much as a Political Tripos, a machinery by which men could be trained for learning, reasoning, and perhaps acting in politics: that is, in public affairs connected with the welfare of the State. (234)

What was inscribed at the heart of historical studies was the formation of character, a liberal training for men destined to be part of the new ruling elites. The study of history in Oxford and Cambridge was moulded to inculcate the qualities befitting Britain's governing elites, including features of England's national past offering both practical knowledge and moral instruction. In accordance with the Whig[18] historical tradition, academic studies in history focused on Britain's constitutional history, marked by a sense of continuity since the Anglo-Saxon times and by a set of historical characters taken as models for the contemporary British nation (King Alfred, Simon de Montfort…). In this history, the acquisition of colonies was endowed with a sense of moral destiny and "a view of Christian involvement in the world"

17 Qtd. in Soffer ("The Modern University"173).

18 I here allude to the historiographical trend that M. Bentley defines as a "historical frame of mind", shared by historians from T. B. Macaulay to W. Stubbs and E. A. Freeman (6). Henry Butterfield gave to the term its classic formulation in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), strongly criticizing its value judgements and presentism. For him, Whig history wrongly "stud[ied] the past with reference to the present" (25), while introducing a "line of causation" (12) due to the belief in the inevitability of progress. The over-emphasis on Britain's constitutional monarchy as the token of this progress and the selection that such a biased attitude entailed were also the aim of his criticism and definition of Whig history.

(Bentley 72). However, if one takes a look at the content of what was taught in Browning's day at Cambridge, what stands out is the absence of imperial history until 1906, when it became a Tripos—an examined subject. John Seeley publicly regretted it: his set of lectures later published as *The Expansion of England* was a clear attempt to put the empire on the academic agenda, though, as Porter notices, he did nothing to actually implement it in his university's curriculum (*Absent-Minded* 49). Nevertheless, the world of higher education was far from standing aloof from contemporary preoccupations about the state of Britain's future, for the obvious reason that it was forming its leaders. Accordingly, the conception of history as a political science predominated over the research ideal and matched the increasing opportunities offered to young, well-educated men in public service careers. Oscar Browning was quite evidently a part of this culture, which, though it couldn't be straightforwardly termed imperialistic, supported national values and accepted the reality of the empire. However, whether Whig historical assumptions got translated into Browning's popular[19] writings remains to be more thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, if the social elites thus rallied around the belief of Britain's mission in the world through the study of history, I shall argue that it was also the case of the masses, those destined to be the followers of Balfour, Curzon and the like; in what different ways and to what different ends, I shall further explore.

II. Mass-education and the rise of the working class

Analysing the collusion between elite classes and their particular mindset may appear as a long focus on a mere fringe of this reflection. However, I have tried to show that the agenda of higher education, Oscar Browning's most direct environment, was to a certain extent determined by the issues of national identity, of which the empire was a natural component, and by the necessity to safeguard Britain's place in the world in the face of external threats. But the defensiveness and defiance that accompanied movements such as that of national efficiency did not only stem from Foreign Affairs dark clouds. The nineteenth century was the century of determining social changes for Britain, among which is to be noted a new sense of class belonging, revived by successive extensions of the franchise. While reading got increasingly democratized, the necessity to redefine the goals of popular education to ensure social peace became urgent (Altick 155). In that sense, Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and civil society are useful lenses through which to envisage the role of schools in the inculcation of “consent” to the dominant ideology, and the ways it was both secured and contested. Arguing along these lines, I shall attempt to explore the building process of education in the

19 That is to say, directed to the general public outside his university's audience.

second half of the century, and shall try to pinpoint other converging factors that both supported and were a consequence of mass education.

Accounting for "the onward march of education"[20]

In the "Literary intelligence" of its January 1885 edition, the bi-monthly trade journal *The Publishers' Circular*, monitoring the state of the British publishing industry and following the trends of the market, could make the following gleeful comment:

> The onward march of education . . . is noticeable on all sides. Even as matters stand, intellectual training is placed so completely within the reach of all classes of the people at a merely nominal price, that education is virtually free. (2)

Introducing the issue to the reader, the statement was obviously aimed at publishers, encouraging them to profit from this promising outlet. Such comments on policies that touched publishers' interests was a common practice in *The Publishers' Circular*,[21] and they offer a fascinating insight into the repercussions of educational policies and the debates triggered among the professionals who advertised their products within the newspaper's pages. However, before spelling out the history of mass education in the second half of the nineteenth century, and how it was greeted by publishers, I shall turn briefly towards the conditions that created a favourable environment for the teaching and development of literacy among the working class.

The "proliferation of printing houses and the growth of existing ones . . . throughout the nineteenth century" (Twyman 10) is one indicator of the good health of publishing, supported by the steady decrease in the costs of production and by advances in the very business of printing. Processes of engraving were improved through the use of new technologies, such as lithography; colour-printing and illustrations came into use, and, most importantly, the optimization of the workforce led to a greater productivity (Twyman 22-50). Books and newspapers subsequently became cheaper to produce and cheaper to purchase: in the domain of education, it was the main appealing feature of readers which schools bought in priority, for they could not afford much spending for their most humble scholars. As it celebrated its forty-nine years of publication with a retrospect, *The Publishers' Circular* extolled this "production of literature at a cheap price" as "the great material indication of the advance of letters during the past half century. In the social history of the country there can be no chapter more striking

20 "Literary Intelligence". *The Publishers' Circular* 47:1136 (15 January 1885): 2. *ncse.* Web. 26 January 2016.

21 *The Publishers' Ciruclar* was a trade journal for the publishing industry launched in 1837, issuing fortnightly lists of new publications, statistics, articles, and advertisements relevant to the book trade. I have had accessed to the issues spanning the 1880s thanks to the project Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition (ncse)—a free, online edition of nineteenth-century newspapers.

in its importance."[22] Concomitant with an easier, cheaper access to printed matter, such as national newspapers that spread news and political comments much more swiftly than before, the two Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884, as well as subsequent parliamentary reform acts, triggered a formidable increase of the electorate—the British working man was now able to make his demands on politicians heard in the ballot. F.H. Spenser's hailing of the years 1884-5-6 precisely bore on those two aspects: "a newspaper was worth reading then, for it was 1884-5-6 and things were happening. There was the Franchise, and the Soudan!" (114). In this context of extended franchise, the famous epigram "We must educate our masters", attributed to Robert Lowe—then vice-president of the Committee of Council on Education—after the passing of the bill in 1867, evidently expressed the kind of actions that were thought to be urgently needed by the dominant classes. School instruction derived more from political anxiety than from a genuine commitment to a widespread education. This reminder may prevent us from falling into the "fallacious equation of literacy with socio-cultural progress" (Luke 11): the competence of literacy, generally thought of as a hindrance to political backwardness, as favouring independence of mind and democratisation of thought, can also be deliberately misled and thwarted in opposite directions, most notably in one's early years of education. I shall argue that this was partly the aim underlying the expansion of the school system for working-class children in the late nineteenth-century Britain: the process of learning how to read while learning about the history of Britain was thoroughly supervised and strictly defined. In the preface to his *History of the Modern World,* Browning put the emphasis on the political utility of his work, in harmony with his view of history as a political science, here brought within the reach of a popular audience: "It has often been said that the study of contemporary history, so important for the education of a politically-minded nation, is neglected among us". He ambitiously and publicly professed his aim to make up for the negligence: "Let us hope that an attempt to give political knowledge will be in England also the accompaniment of an extended suffrage" ("The Teaching of History in School" 17).

The framing of elementary education

The market for educational books expanded rapidly not only because of swift developments in technology, but also because of state intervention in the framing of instruction from 1860 onwards. A chronology of British educational history in the nineteenth century needs here to be briefly sketched. Before 1850, the state of education for the lower classes of the British society was pretty grim: Sunday schools, "dame" and infant schools for very young children,

22 "Literary Intelligence". *The Publishers' Circular* 49:1177 (1 October 1886): 1055. *ncse.* Web. 26 January 2016.

charity institutions from the age of philanthropy were attempts to provide primary education to the growing population of Great Britain—but their provision was largely inadequate,[23] and efforts at a more widespread elementary instruction were thwarted by the need for unskilled labour in the industry. The 1833 Factory Act was a first attempt to reduce child work—it limited working hours—and included provision for their instruction (Curtis 206-224). However limited in scope, the Factory Act paved the way for a renewed attention to general elementary instruction. In 1858, the Newcastle Commission conducted one of the first comprehensive surveys on elementary education, pointed out its shortcomings[24] and made recommendations for the newly-created Education Department, designed to extend "a sound and cheap elementary instruction to all classes of people".[25] This resulted in a series of reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century. A landmark in the history of education, Robert Lowe's 1862 "Revised Code" ranked children in six "Standards" based solely on their ages: children aged 7 started in Standard 1, up to the ones aged 12 in Standard 6. Additionally, the Code introduced the system of "payment by results"—namely the setting up of national standards of competence and basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic that were to be assessed in every child attending an elementary school. According to his or her proficiency, as well as to rates of attendance, an annual grant of twelve shillings was then paid to the school, or for every failure an amount of 2s.8d. was to be lost by the school (Curtis 258). The system was subsequently heavily criticized for having introduced stultifying rote learning and the sole study of the three Rs, which were the only grant-earning subjects, as was exemplified in 1888, by Whishaw's *Extracts from the evidence given before the Royal Commission on Elementary Education*:

> Teachers are afraid that if the children happen to miss the reading of a certain passage in a book, or the spelling of a certain passage, they will lose the grant; and hence they are continually grinding day after day those three books. ("From the evidence of Mr. J. Powell" 37)
>
> It [payment by results] impedes the introduction of new methods of instruction. Teachers are afraid (I experience it day by day myself) to venture on any course . . . lest it may interfere to some extent with this mechanical accuracy that is insisted upon. It makes the aim of the teachers the securing of the greatest number of passes and not the full development of the intelligence of the scholar. Its main result as regards the scholar has been to give him a distaste for school. ("From the evidence of Mr. J.H. Devonshire" 51)

23 See Curtis: "The conditions in. . . dame-schools and in private adventure schools were almost too horrible to credit" (232).

24 "The children do not, in fact, receive the kind of education they require. . . we have seen overwhelming evidence from Her Majesty's Inspectors, to the effect that not more than one fourth of the children receive a good education. So great a failure in the teaching demanded the closest investigation" ("The Royal Commission on the state of popular education in England" qtd. in Young and Hancock 893).

25 Qtd. in Hirsch and McBeth (xviii).

But it is truly William Forster's Education Act, in 1870, which marked an attempt to generalise a free, universal and compulsory education for children of the working class. Admittedly, the purpose of the Act was to "complete the present voluntary system, to fill up gaps, sparing the public money where it can be done without."[26] It established local school boards, responsible for the provision of education (they notably erected and run the new elementary schools)[27] and empowered by the Act to frame bylaws for compulsory attendance. In the following decades, although school fees were still a burden for many working-class families and a hindrance to instruction, school attendance steadily increased (Lyon 31-32) and supported the spread of literacy (Altick 165). Variety in subject matter was then ushered in the curriculum, as reports from the Royal Education Commission were followed by a regular output of Educational Codes with new requirements: to the obligatory subjects (or "elementary subjects") such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and needlework, were added optional (or "class") subjects: singing, English, geography, elementary science and history —"subjects of instruction for which grants may be made' (Moss 9). As a consequence of these developments, which broadened and homogenized the school market, the need for pedagogical material soared and a greater activity on the part of publishers ensued: according to Alexis Weedon, the years between 1871 and 1894 represented a period of intense churning for the British educational market, as publishing houses competed to take the lion's share of this stable outlet (116). As is noticed by *The Publishers' Circular* in its January 1885 issue: "Turning to the share in that work which is allotted to publishers, booksellers and stationers, we find activity and enterprise ruling on all sides" (2). A proof for the great demand of educational artefacts was the inventory shortage that Browning's publishers sometimes encountered: in a letter dating from September 1883,[28] Longmans acknowledged unexpected orders that had exhausted the stocks of *Modern England*, "just at the most inconvenient (school) time"—a critical period for an educational publisher. Together with Mandell Creighton's *Age of Elizabeth*, the book was indeed one of the most successful history textbooks of the years 1879-1905, having sold a total of 34,000 copies during the period (Heathorn 13). But this flooding of the educational market by cheaply-produced small books also triggered its share of anxieties. Many educationists dreaded a potential downgrade in the

26 W. Forster, qtd. in Curtis (276).

27 "Every school board for the purpose of providing sufficient public school accommodation for their district, whether in obedience to any requisition or not, may provide, by building or otherwise, schoolhouses properly fitted up, and improve, enlarge, and fit up any schoolhouse provided by them, and supply school apparatus and everything necessary for the efficiency of the schools provided by them" (Preston, 16).

28 Longmans, Green and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 27 September 1883. MS OB/1/986/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

quality standards of pedagogical material: “Reading books should be chosen with great care. Poor children read few other books, and no children read any other books so slowly, so minutely, or so repeatedly” (Salmon 115). I shall expound further the requirements that publishers and authors had to comply with in order to sell what were truly commercial commodities, but first, I aim at highlighting the particular place that history achieved within the curriculum of elementary schools.

III. The rise of history in elementary schools' curriculum

If the teaching of history slowly came to gain some prominence in the curriculum of elementary schools, it was not without having to breach economic and mental barriers before. Its formal introduction in the curriculum was subject to the definition of its purpose and value; its actual teaching in elementary education depended on external, economic factors while at the same time being connected to its establishment as an academic discipline in universities, with its self-legitimizing scientific standards.

What is history and why should it be studied?

The 1860s and 1870s were bleak decades for the discipline in elementary education. During the period mentioned, the exposure of pupils to history as regards in-class teaching was strikingly low (Heathorn 38). A reason that accounts for this absence is Lowe's Revised Code of 1862: not being part of the grant-earning three Rs condemned many subjects to be neglected by teachers, as too costly and unnecessary for children whose station in life would not require much beyond the basic skills of literacy and arithmetic. Furthermore, the teaching of history touched upon delicate, potentially tendentious subjects, especially as far as religious denomination was concerned. In 1888, this situation was a cause for complaint on the part of some teachers:

> I look upon it [history] as being possibly one of the most important subjects that can be introduced to the notice of a child. I regret very much that it is almost extinct as a subject in our elementary schools. (Whishaw, “From the evidence of Mr. W.B. Adams” 42)

The discipline's gradual return to grace was favoured by a series of revisions of the educational code. The demise of the “payment by results” system (1896) and the introduction of mandatory history classes in the 1900 Education Code made it possible for history to wind its way into formal instruction, with its share of history textbooks. But elementary scholars had been long before exposed to Britain’s history in another way—not through the actual class subject itself, but in learning to read with historical readers. Their use soared after the

1880 Education Code, which required teachers to employ three different reading books, one of which needed to be historical in content.[29] Instructions to inspectors in examining reading proficiency also demonstrated the relevance of history: from Standards III upwards, pupils were expected to read from a history of England. As Stephen Heathorn has shown in his minute examination of those primers, *For Home, Country and Race*, elementary schoolchildren were in fact much likelier to learn national history from those readers, than in history textbooks, which were much less in use for the reasons discussed so far—their absence from the formal curriculum and their higher cost for schools (4).

The introduction of historical reading books tallied with a whole spate of educationists' writings, which pushed for the active promotion of citizenship among elementary school children. History was deemed particularly useful to that purpose and enjoyed a revival of interest from every side of the educational field: questions regarding the purpose of history and the proper way it was to be taught were major themes of discussion. In evaluating the state of history teaching in schools, and deploring its so far "lack of organon" (Browning, "The Teaching of History" 3), the chairman opening the proceedings of the Royal Historical Society was able to declare:

> In fact it [history] was concerned with instruction rather than education; but the instruction, the information it gave was of vital importance for it introduced the pupil into the region of human life and the sphere of human effort. For these reason it was a necessary subject of study for all, and its necessity was increasingly recognised. (3)

The view of history as imparting practical knowledge about "all things human" is vindicated by many other educationists: in *The Art of Teaching* (1898), David Salmon explicitly stated that history is

> A preparation for life. Separating what is relevant from what is incidental, and what is probable from what is impossible, judging what opportunities the witness had for knowing the truth . . . are essential in the domain of History, but they are no less essential in the affairs of everyday. (213)

Being such a well preparation for life by exercising the scholar's judgement, as well as being enjoyable by arousing his or her imagination, history was also deemed highly commendable for the values it inculcated. David Salmon's description of them is worth quoting in full. Quite plainly,

> History fosters patriotism. It fills the student with admiration for his forefathers' wisdom, heroism, and devotion to duty, which have made the nation what it is, with longings for a

29 In the formula of the 1890 Education Code: "Two sets of reading books must be provided for Standards I. and II., and three, one of which should relate to English history, for each standard above the second" (Russell 44).

> chance of emulating their glorious deeds, and, failing that, with a firm resolve to do nothing that shall tarnish the fair fame of their common country, and to pay the debt which he owes his ancestors . . . The study of History should be a necessary preliminary to the performance of civic obligations. (213)

It would be fruitless to recall at length similar arguments in other pedagogues' writings: "frequent opportunities for moral training", "many examples of noble self-sacrifice for one's country" in Collar and Crook's words (183-184); "patriotism, citizenship, moral training, and the development of general intelligence" for Joseph Cowham (341): history seemed to be unanimously celebrated. It should be noted, however, that while the trend in pedagogy offered such an irreproachable view of the effects of history, the reality of the practice may have somewhat differed. The extent to which historical lessons were successful in inculcating patriotism, moral training and a fair sense of discrimination was not deemed a sufficient criterion of examination for the Education Department.[30] What mattered most about historical readers was their ability to impart literacy. Yet history's critical acclaim not only rested on its supposedly good effects as regards character formation: it was also grounded on solid academic foundations, from which such a writer of readers as Browning could derive legitimacy.

A scholarly discipline?

In Britain, the status of historians gradually tended to become more professionalized by the end of the nineteenth century. Up to that point, autodidacts, antiquarians and archaeologists had coexisted side by side but a true historical scholarship had been lacking in Britain, at odds with the increasing interest of Victorian Britain for the past (Levine 30-40). However, as the century grew older, the prominence of Regius Professors of Modern History, such as Seeley at Cambridge, succeeded by Lord Acton, and Stubbs at Oxford, as well as a rising generation of new historians, favoured the creation of a community keen on breaking with the tradition of amateurism that had so far been the earmark of history making in Britain—a process, which, as Foucault remarks, constitutes the basis by which a discipline can actually come into existence:

> La discipline est un principe de contrôle de la production du discours. Elle lui fixe des limites par le jeu d'une identité qui a la forme d'une réactualisation permanente des règles. (*L'ordre du discours* 37-38)

As such, Carlyle and Macaulay, though they were immensely popular historians for the general public, came to embody what Seeley and his peers most despised: a narrative

30 "Failure to answer questions on the meaning of words or phrases should not, however, be taken into account in determining the individual pass, but only in the assessment of the merit grant" (Moss 88).

approach to the past, readable, entertaining and attractive to the layman only.[31] To this model, they opposed the German tradition of historiography, best represented by Ranke and his quasi-scientific historical method, which included a work on primary sources, critical investigations followed by a scientific publication. The first issue of the *English Historical Review* (1886) is taken to mark their professionalization as a community of historical researchers, with its shared codes and rights of entry (Lambert 41). As a Cambridge don well connected to his peers, Browning had a share in the enterprise, contacting potential publishers for the review and then submitting articles when it came into print. Gentlemen of letters had no place in this close circle of experts, being shunned by the new ethos of historical expertise, and even narrower was the place allotted to the general public. E.A. Freeman, a colleague of Seeley, made the following remark, paraphrasing the Regius Professor at Cambridge: "To make sure of being judged by competent judges only, we ought to make history so dull and unattractive that the general public will not wish to meddle with it".[32] Nothing seemed to be clearer than this wish for a clear-cut, separate sphere of research and "scientific" learning. Yet, as Leslie Howsam underlines in her article "Academic Discipline or Literary Genre?", the lines that these historians tried to draw in the realm of history writing were slippery, partly because of the pressure they faced coming from commercial publishers, who clearly saw the limited reach among the public of "dull and unattractive" writings (526). Additionally, boundaries between the newly professionalized historians in universities and what happened in elementary schools were breached by those academics who

> involved themselves in the *practice* of school history teaching: first, by writing texts and delivering lectures for teachers; second, by writing reading books and textbooks for use in the classroom; and third, by presiding over a new generation of graduates of degree schemes in modern history who would themselves form a new cadre of specialist authors. (Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 26)

Oscar Browning seems to stand at this precise junction: constantly vying for his peers' recognition—he applied unsuccessfully for prestigious positions within the historical circles, such as the Regius chair of Modern History after Seeley's death—and yet publishing the genre of history that his very peers loved to despise: narratives for children which spread anecdotes about King Alfred's burnt cakes or Robert the Bruce's spiders, i.e. picturesque, folkloric versions of the past. However, what is most interesting is that those popular versions of history also tried to bridge the gap that separated their wide audience from the academic

31 In addition to this, the authors from this "amateur tradition" sought to create empathy in the readers; by means of style, they strove to understand the deeds of men from the past. They also firmly believed in historical continuity and forged encompassing narratives to account for it, sometimes at the expense of truthfulness (Jann 125-126).

32 Qtd. in Howsam ("Academic Discipline or Literary Genre" 525).

world. This is what the word “popular” itself quite tellingly reveals. Accounts that were “popular” served as media and translators of supposedly more scientific and exacting readings —readings that were precisely meant to be understood by a handful of experts. As Stephan Berger cogently argues, “Behind the notion of the popular historian, in other words, stood the assumption that historical research was too technical and too complicated to be understood by ordinary people” (16). A look at the paratext of Browning's readers and textbooks can confirm this role of intermediary: in his *New Illustrated History of England,* the author strove to remedy to the disjunction between academic and popular accounts in “produc[ing] a popular work for the general reader, which at the same time is in accordance with the results of the latest research” (preface). He very well appears as the mediator vulgarizing the advances of his fellow experts. That is why he acknowledged “no pretensions to originality or research” in the preface of the *History of the Modern World*, or admitted that “Books of this nature cannot pretend to be original. The writer has had recourse to the best sources of information. He has also attempted the experiment . . . of interpolating extracts from contemporary and well-known authorities with his own description of historical events” (*The Newbury Historical Readers* 3:5). In the texts themselves, Browning indeed often referred to his fellow historians, sometimes by quoting them quite explicitly, as is the case when he came to explain the significance of Magna Carta: “Dr Stubbs says of it 'the Great Charter is the first great public act of the nation'” (*New Illustrated History of England* 1:109). Stubbs was indeed part of the canon of British historians, a recognised scholar whose *Select Charters* (1867) and *Constitutional History* (1874-8) influenced generations of students and historians (Soffer, “History at Oxford” 91). In readers, where the demands for scientificity were even lower, simple cross-references could be found in the table of contents, with names of historians beneath the main subtitles or, when dedicated for Standards higher than the first and second, they could be inserted in footnotes, with detailed information about the historian. For instance, the account of the Norman Conquest in the fourth book of *The Newbery Historical Readers* includes a reference to the Norman historian Vitalis: “Ordericus Vitalis, from whom this and other extracts are taken, was born near S. in 1075. He was a contemporary historian of the conquest of England” (3:37).

Browning’s borrowings from other authors' writings had yet to be monitored by his publishers. Taking one publishing house in particular can provide us with an interesting example of this. In the case of the readers published by Griffith, Farran and Co., Browning's editor confronted him with the necessity to report precisely from whom he borrowed content:

> We find that you are drawing largely from other authors to complete the "Historical Readers" and we shall be glad to know what steps you are taking to secure permission for these extracts. We observe that you are now using Gardiner somewhat extensively – for which we suppose we shall, as in the case of Thackeray, have to pay. Of course such payments will have to be deducted from the balance of the payment to be made to you.[33]

The issue of copyright and authorship was quite a major concern for the publishing house: in the very last letter of the correspondence between them, Griffith and Farran informed him that a rival publisher, Longman, had asked "whether they gave permissions for the extracts of Gardiner"[34] Browning had used in their readers. From his answer certainly depended the image of Griffith and Farran, as a case of plagiarism could greatly tarnish a publisher's, as well as an author's reputation. Quite simply, these situations were publicly reported in the pages of *The Publishers' Circular*, the trade journal of the publishing industry: Browning experienced it to his own advantage, when it was reported in the first issue of September, 1881, that

> It is satisfactory to find that a clear answer has been given to the charge of literary piracy recently preferred by Mr. Oscar Browning against Professor Payne, of the University of Michigan. Professor Payne was charged by Mr. Browning with having appropriated verbatim an article on education contributed by the latter to the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica,' and published in a book which bears the Professor's name on its title-page, but does not contain 'any mention of Mr. Browning's name from cover to cover.' ("Literary Intelligence" 691)

Browning himself was warned against the eventuality of "'plagiarism', whether plagiarism of [him]self, or someone else" by his editor at Cassel and Co., James Walter Smith:

> I certainly should not like to have another publisher, to whom you had sold the copyright of matter written years ago, to bring an action against me for using his material.
>
> So that you will have to be pretty careful.[35]

The inclusion of historical authorities in educational and didactic materials certainly lent a great deal of legitimacy to the accounts in question. Browning himself made use of his position as a Cambridge don in reminding his readers of his own credentials, and thus of his ability in playing the intermediary between the world of academics and that of the layman:

> During 30 years spent in teaching history at the University, there are few of the occurrences here narrated about which he [the author] has not lectured or written or which he has not discussed with students. (*A History of the Modern World* preface)

33 Griffith, Farran and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 19 June 1884. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

34 Griffith, Farran and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 1 June 1893. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

35 Cassel and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 16 December 1910. MS OB/1/320/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

In this sense, the polarity between the so-called sphere of academic knowledge and the general public came to be mediated and redefined by agents playing the role of interface. A member of this academic world himself, well connected and acquainted with the work of his peers, Browning was fittingly qualified to move in this liminal zone of knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO – Writing and publishing popular history: "a battle for cultural authority"[36]

> We are entitled to do absolutely as we please with the content of the Historical Readers
>
> – Griffith, Farran and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 16 February 1886.[37]

Textbooks and readers, being dynamically shaped by the socio-political context in which they were produced, need in that respect to be considered as cultural artefacts; but sufficient attention must also be paid to their production as economic commodities as well. Authors, editors, publishers, and even teachers drew a particular form of symbolic capital from the production of knowledge and the recognition that went with it (the interplay between *connaissance* and *reconnaissance*).[38] The relations of power and hierarchy that organized the production, the distribution of tasks and the material conditions surrounding the publication of popular texts—the "middle-zone of cultural space"[39]—shall lead me to re-evaluate and qualify what one traditionally takes to be the author's omnipotence. In Browning's case, I shall furthermore try to determine the specific nature of his relationship with his popular works, and what writing for elementary schools entailed in terms of restrictions for an author, whose legitimacy is etymologically[40] founded on the ability to "take action or make a decision", as a "person who has weight and authority" (*OED*). I shall indeed be showing that Browning had to walk a fine line between his own agency as a writer and the requirements he had to face coming from his publishers. In doing so, I hope to shed light on the importance of studying items that belong to the material culture of a given time—with a focus on "the ways they were traded, given and generally integrated into forms of exchange, the materials available and the ways in which they were valued, the volumes of things circulating and the genre and conventions in which they existed" (Jordanova). Additionally, following the contention that those "things were being talked about, and in a variety of ways: from lists and account books, to newspapers articles, books and magazines to journals and diaries, from learned societies to shops and so on" (*ibid*.), I shall endeavour to identify the ways Browning's texts were

36 Inglis (23).
37 Griffith and Farran. Letter to Oscar Browning. 16 February 1886. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.
38 Bourdieu (*The Field of Cultural Production* 7).
39 English (12).
40 The word "author" comes from the latin *auctor*, a "guarantor, surety, person who approves or authorizes" (*OED*).

marketed, publicized, and put forward to children from elementary schools.

I. Making the text: Oscar Browning and his publishers

Exploring the way book-trade issues intervened into the process of composition must be understood in terms of collaborations and compromises. I shall rely heavily on Browning's correspondence with his editors and publishers, because more than the printed texts themselves, these letters reveal the commercial and money-related motivations that were concealed behind the public statements of his pedagogical intentions. This way, I shall attempt to focus on the agency of publishers and their editors in fashioning popular texts according to their own agenda, and on their role as fully-fledged interpretive instances.

A competitive educational market

While the 1860s remained a bleak decade for the educational publishing industry and elementary school books as a whole (Stray and Sutherland 370), the ensuing decades were the object of fierce battles between established and recent publishing houses—a competition best illustrated by the increasing space allocated to advertisements in *The Publishers' Circular*. According to Alexis Weedon's analysis of the newspaper from 1860 to 1894, sixteen new publishing houses made their appearance in the year 1871 alone (117). As noted by Christopher Stray and Gillian Sutherland (373), it was also precisely during this period that Sampson Low issued its first record of "eight or nine thousand Educational Books . . . issued by nearly one hundred and fifty publishers" (sic – preface): *A Classified Catalogue of School, College, Classical, Technical, and General Educational Work in Use in Great Britain in the Early Part of 1871*—a move which Walter Low grounded in "the general interest taken in Educational [sic] matters at the present time" (*ibid.*).[41] In the subsequent 1876 edition of the catalogue, the catalogue testified to an upsurge in educational books: their number amounted to "nearer fifteen thousand than eight or nine thousand" (preface). Yet, Simon Eliot also identified an "anomaly" (48) in his analysis of the educational market following Forster's Education Act (1870): the market saw "a minor-over production at the beginning of the decade, followed by a slump in the middle of the decade which would, in turn, be replaced by a surge at the end" (*ibid.*),[42] thus going against the idea of publishers answering *en masse* to

41 I have found that no less than 215 books had been published by 48 different publishers for the year 1871, listed under the entry "Readers and reading books". The figures dropped at 193 readers in 1876, published by 54 different publishers. It is yet difficult to assess which ones were *historical* reading books by their titles alone.

42 The statistical data he used is reproduced in the appendix, table 2.

the new opportunities.[43] Moreover, as Weedon remarks, "only 10 of the 60 firms (16 per cent) who advertised in 1860 placed advertisements in the 1894 issue" (118) as an effect of competition: publishing houses that were leading the market in terms of sales and reputation, among which could be found Longman,[44] Sampson Low, Griffith & Farran, Macmillan, Murray, Williams and Norgate, and George Bell.[45] To these major commercial publishers can be added Nelson and Sons, "Blackie, Cassel, Chambers, Collins, Pitman, and later Edward Arnold"[46] which reaped to the full the benefits of publishing educational series. It is of particular interest to note that the 1884 issue of *The Publisher's Circular* advertised the greatest number of new publishers, but that its advertisements were dominated by four top firms: Sampson Low, Griffith and Farran, Cassel and Co., and the Clarendon Press (Weedon 117-118).

Because of a such a fierce competition between the firms engaged to cater for the needs of the promising new mass market, publishers had to respond with decisions and moves that could have little to do with education—i.e. what Heathorn cogently described as "the demands of the school codes, the dictates of the inspectorship [sic], and the perceived desires of the educational authorities" (16). Additionally, the competitiveness of the market drove publishing firms to clamp down on costs and expenditure, as shown by the propositions made by the publishers to Browning. At the beginning of their collaborations, every reader and textbook were the objects of hard bargains, as illustrated by Griffith and Farran, who made it clear that historical reading-books

> which have always to face very keen competition do not yield so much profit either to author or publishers if successful as many other books, because of the great expense necessary to keep them before teachers by advertising . . . moreover they have to be produced at a comparatively cheap rate to suit the needs of Public Elementary schools. (14 October 1882)
>
> While we thoroughly recognise the justice of the principle that an author should, so far as practicable, share with the publisher in the financial success of his books, yet in the case of school books the future is unclear, and the effort required to effect a large sale is so great in proportion to the pecuniary result, that we cannot enter upon an agreement on the basis you describe. (24 November 1882)

As a consequence, they did not hesitate to turn down Browning's repeated proposals as

43 Eliot tries to account for such counter-intuitive results by emphasizing that the absolute number of titles did increase, but not the percentage shares, that the figures deal with first editions and reprints, but not print runs (i.e., the production of existing titles), and that it took some time for schools to comply with the Act's requirements (48).

44 The firm published no less than "a dozen different elementary reader series, many of which had total publication runs of between 50,000 and 115,000 books per standard per year" by the 1890s (Heathorn, 15).

45 For a full list of the publishers see Weedon (118).

46 Heathorn (14).

regards the amount of his royalties—resulting in pleas and complaints that were an earmark of his negotiations with publishers. This sometimes verged on acrimony, especially with J.S. Virtue and Co., as their responses illustrate:

> You cannot complain of £45 being owed to you by us when we have only just had the proofs a day or so. (12 October 1888)
>
> Provided you send us more copy <u>at once</u> (sic) to go on with we shall have no objection to make your payments for each part within a month of its leaving your hands; but failing to receive this we shall have to revert to our original agreement of payment for each part on publication as the delay is causing us considerable inconvenience. (23 October 1888)
>
> We have always had most pleasant relations with the numerous authors we have come in contact with; but we have never received a couple of peremptory demands for payment in the course of two or three posts after receiving final proofs and this after being promised a cheque. (2 November 1888)

When Browning was asked to extend the work in question, *The New Illustrated History of England*, in a fifth volume, similar squabbling happened:

> As the amount you name in yours of the 17th is exactly double what you asked for writing the four volumes of History of England, we are afraid it is quite prohibitive. (19 March 1900)

For books whose main quality had to be their cheapness, these negotiations had a considerable import, since printing, proofreading, illustrations, corrections and sometimes binding all added up to form the final cost. Very often, the first few letters to Browning were sent to put out feelers, letting him make a first offer and then suggesting a somewhat inferior sum. In every case, they reminded him of the constraints of price they had to comply with:

> The only suggestions we offer are . . . to exercise care that the outside space of actual matter does not in all exceed 222 pp. If the matter ran beyond this limit we could not with the addition of 50 pp. of illustrations, coloured maps, etc., produce the book at 2/-, which is an outside price for a work for the Elementary schools. (Pitman and Sons, 3 December 1900)

Every collaboration started by this kind of psychological showdown, which hinged around the risks each actor of the game was willing to take, and which publishers unquestionably won. Most of Browning's contracts were based on the payment of advances and royalties, which secured him moderate[47] returns, although he also made the mistake to sell the copyright of some of his readers—a move he regretted bitterly, as I shall mention later, for he had no

47 My research on this point has been limited by the impossibility to access records of the sales figures and account books concerning Browning's texts—or to the formal agreements between Browning and the publishing firms. The only available figures to be found are scarcely provided by the correspondence, which does not indicate precisely how much money Browning made from the school books over the entire period of time during which these were sold.

recourse whatsoever on the use of the material.

But pressure was also exercised in terms of time: obviously tied up to certain imperatives of date, such as the return of the school year or the publisher's own agenda, Browning's manuscripts had to be sent to be corrected and then printed in due time for a proper advertising campaign. Here again, he incurred his editors' ire, sometimes even despair. During the composition of his *New Illustrated History of England*, he seemed to have been constantly behind schedule, hence the impressive number of missives from J.S. Virtue, urging him to send his drafts promptly:

> Copy next part history urgently wanted. Publication delayed greatly. (Telegraph, 21 October 1889)
>
> We are so terribly behindhand that we really do not know what to do . . . We can quite understand that your time is very much occupied, but the delay is causing us such a very serious financial loss, to say nothing of the discredit it brings only issuing one part in about seven months, that we feel compelled to bring it under your notice. (1 November 1889)
>
> We are very reluctant to ask you to hurry your copy, but the complaints have now become so numerous, that we feel it would not be right to keep you in ignorance of them.
>
> Were it only one or two cases we would not trouble you. Our day Lane manager reports that the dealers now are complaining and giving up working the book, and the delay in publishing the parts is affecting his returns very considerably. (4 November 1889)
>
> We must again, however, draw your attention to the urgent necessity of sending us the completion of the copy immediately. In fact we cannot publish any more parts until we have it all up in type. (19 February 1890)

This situation lasted until the actual publication of the volumes, in May 1890. The process of composition was thus quite significantly altered and pressured by editorial demands, in line with perceived economic pressures—but these were not the sole criteria weighing on text construction. Accommodating to the target-market did not only imply cheapness, but correctness and accuracy as regards content, and compliance with schools' requests. In this domain, publishers played the role of watchdogs monitoring Browning's progress: little latitude was permitted to the author, forced to move within the limits of a highly-standardised environment.

Publishing the best product on the market: finding the good format

The growth of state provision for education, particularly after the establishment of board schools with the 1870 Forster Act, greatly encouraged variety in prices as well as titles. The Education Department rejected the idea of sanctioning any set of “government approved

textbooks" (Weedon 126); but professed, in the *Circular 233: Reading Books – England and Wales*, to

> give the largest freedom to authors, publishers, managers, and teachers, in regard to the production and use of school books adapted to different classes of learners, and varied from time to time so as to suit the advancement of knowledge and the improvement in educational methods. (F.R. Stanford, qtd. in Weedon 126-127)

In spite of such an ostensible statement of non-commitment, the boundaries of the "largest freedom" authorised to the professionals of education were framed by official specifications, in particular about the format of readers. Publishers and authors of readers had to comply with standards that were enunciated in very clear and detailed instructions by educational codes:

> 40 lessons and not less should be required in Standards I. and II., and not less than 60 lessons and 120 pages in higher standards. (Moss 88)

When in the process of writing those readers, Browning was constantly reminded about the amount that was left for him to add, or that he had to cut away. Deciphering the letters of Griffith and Farran, I have found that an immense majority of these contained calls to order, reminders and confirmations of the expected structure of textbooks—sometimes, when Browning turned a deaf ear to the letters, with attached illustrations of the code's requirements:

> From the enclosed memoranda you will see exactly the difficulty in which we are placed —a difficulty which it was impossible for us to foresee—and we trust you will see your way to help us out of it. Unless the books can be made to exactly comply with the requirements of the Department they are absolutely useless. (20 November 1883)

That state prescriptions were met with anxiety by publishers is clearly expressed by Griffith and Farran's constant monitoring of the latest Codes: in May 1883, a new issue of the educational circular called for a series of cautious interpretations:

> It would seem that the Code will never be crystallized, for every day reveals some fresh aspects of the requirements, with which we must of course be quite abreast. We think however the memorandum enclosed represents them in their final form—for it is not only based upon the witness experience of a Teacher, but it is supported by one of the Chief Inspector of a large Northern District and we have received today from another Inspector a letter confirming both of them. (21 May 1883)

Griffith and Farran's subsequent promotional campaigns in *The Publishers' Circular* emphasized the correspondence of their readers to the latest Code's requests. In a sales pitch covering half a page of one of the newspaper's advertising sections,[48] Griffith and Farran's Historical Reading Books were thus presented in the issue of January, 18th 1884:

48 See illustration 2 in the appendix.

> Fully Illustrated . . . Each book contains Sixty Lessons, and at least 120 pages of clear letterpress, thus satisfying all the requirements of the Code and of Circular 228. (33)

Two years later, as Griffith and Farran advertised once again the readers, the blurb had barely changed:

> Each Book contains a Map of England and numerous Illustrations, and the right number of lessons and of pages to satisfy the requirements of the Code and of the recent Circulars . . .
>
> PAPER, PRINTING, BINDING, ARE ALIKE EXCELLENT. (sic—15 January 1886 38)

The emphasis laid on the good quality of the material and its special features (be they illustrations, binding, or maps), highlighted in block capital letters intended to catch the eye of the readers, tells us of the reproaches often made again cheap reading books. During its review of elementary education (1886-1888), the Commission on Elementary Education laid bare such deficiencies: in the evidence given before the Commission, criticisms were aimed at

> the insufficient supply of books in a school, from a minimum being prescribed, and the publishers and teachers working down to that minimum. (Whishaw, “From the evidence of the Rev. F. Synge, H.M. Chief Inspector, Eastern Division 36-37)

In its final report, the Commission was as scathing in its comments about reading books:

> Complaints appear to be numerous that . . . the books are dry and not written in the language of the children's homelife, that they are too few in number, and that the reading lesson is interrupted with spelling instead of being wholly devoted to reading and the giving of proper expressions. The Commission recognize that there is room for much improvement in reading, and recommend an increase in the number of books for each standards. (46)

The quality of schoolbooks was also closely scrutinized by educationists. J.G. Fitch devised accordingly “some tests by which the goodness of a school-book may be determined”:

> You have to secure: that it is well printed and attractive, that it is not silly and too childish, that the passages selected are not too short and scrappy, but continuous enough to be of some value in sustaining thought, and that every lesson contains a few—a very few—new words which are distinct additions to the reader's vocabulary. (85)

Most adjectives used by Fitch reveal a pedagogical concern about how these books were to favour a first, positive approach to reading: in a clear, accessible but not stultifying manner, rejecting the mechanical grind that had become the hallmark of the grant-earning subject. Publishers were very well aware of the issue: they constantly pushed Browning to produce texts adapted to the level of proficiency of each Standard.

The level of proficiency, as well as the method employed in a particular reader were announced by a foreword of the author, in which we can retrieve the very same worries about

readability and accessibility. Those prefaces seemed to serve as "articles of belief" directed to teachers or school boards in which particular stress was laid upon the pedagogical virtues of the reader in question:

> The writer has, in the remaining books, aimed rather at simplicity of subject and treatment, than at using elementary language. He has avoided, as far as possible, the multiplication of dates and proper names, which burden the memory without appealing to the intelligence. (*The Newbery Historical Readers* 3:5)

Browning's task was thus largely dominated by the concern to adapt, in some cases dumb down his style and the content of historical facts. When Browning submitted his manuscript to Pitman and Sons, the latter praised it as "most admirably as clear as chrystal [sic], and as interesting as a novel . . . slightly more simple than the VIth and the VIIth standard have now attained. I do not, however, suggest any change".[49] The comparison made with a novel Is striking: I shall indeed show later that the interest of the child had to be roused using techniques of narrativization, at odds with the dryness of historical accounts traditionally written by academics. Though no official rules governed the selection of particular readers and textbooks, it must be noted that in most districts, schoolbooks were examined by committees—either formed by county education officials or school boards representatives—who chose to place them, or not, on an approved requisition list (Heathorn 16). Going through the examination process was essential for publishers and explained why conformity to the educational code remained their utmost priority. Because their main aim was to teach how to read, other sections of reading-books were added to this aim: lists of the new words, or the most difficult ones, encountered in a lesson, generally at the end of the reader,[50] as well as highlighted words or sentences that could be useful in pronunciation exercises. Working within these narrow constraints of formatting, Browning as an author seemed to have, at least, full mastery upon the content of the readers. However, as I shall now argue, book writing was as collaborative an exercise as the formatting of those popular works.

II. Authoring popular history: Oscar Browning's ambivalent position

Bearing in mind the import of the "author function" in our culture might help me scrutinize Browning's equivocal behaviour. In an analysis of the discourse produced by this function,[51] Foucault shed light on the author's inscription in a world of ownership and appropriation best seen through the codification of authors' rights and authors-publishers' relationship. He also

49 Pitman and Sons. Letter to Oscar Browning. 18 January 1901. MS OB/1/1285/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.
50 See illustration 3 the appendix.
51 See 'What Is an Author?' in *Aesthetic, Method, and Epistemology* (205–222).

underlined the construction of the author's figure, varying according to genres, readers and eras, but broadly seen as the creative power and principle of unity at the source of his writings —an augmented figure thanks to a series of *alter egos* within his text and paratext (i.e., prefaces). In texts which do not *per se* belong to literature, I nonetheless argue that these categories can be taken as vantage points around which to re-assess the editorial conditions in which Oscar Browning authored popular textbooks and readers, and to probe the question of his legitimacy as a "producer" of popular culture.

Why Oscar Browning?

In his study of history readers, Stephen Heathorn noted the pre-dominance among schoolbook authors of "professional academics and educationalists" (16) whose credentials and reputation were a guarantee of trustworthiness and a promise of serious scholarship. Oscar Browning perfectly fitted the pattern, as an academic scholar whose interest in pedagogy never failed to translate into books, addresses and participation in ambitious educational ventures (e.g. the Cambridge University Day Training College). Being so well acquainted with the world of education, Browning was also connected with many different publishing houses; he thus knew perfectly well the kinds of requirements and policies in effect among publishers. Notwithstanding the fact that Browning liked to cultivate friendships with every person of influence within his reach, the tone of close intimacy that some of his editors employed in their letters to him is revealing: while monitoring the advance and success of Browning's *Modern England,* George Longman made regular allusions to his days as a former pupil of Browning at Eton, and remained intimate enough with Browning to give him insider's advice. Reciprocally, Browning felt legitimate enough to ask George Longman to send him some of their publications, for free, as principal of the Cambridge University Day Training College (CUDTC)—a request that was rejected, for the CUDTC was "precisely the market aimed at"[52] by the publisher. However trivial and useless those pieces informations might seem at first sight, they enable me to qualify the black and white picture drawn so far. Browning entertained with some of his publishers—those he knew from previous acquaintance, or due to his position in the world of education—relations that went beyond the normal professional framework of the employee/employer relationship.[53] In return, they clearly recognized the value of having such a well-established and well-connected author at

52 Longmans, Green and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 28 January 1904. MS OB/1/986/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

53 As noted by P. Leary and A. Nash, these types of personal and informal exchanges were not uncommon in the Victorian period—provided the writers was successful enough, he could benefit from such a privileged professional guidance (189 and 208).

their service. Arguably, Browning's status as "the man of the day" (Anstruther 103) allowed him a certain freedom and legitimized requests for which his publishers had to make allowances. Outside of his work for elementary schools and a popular audience, Browning's writings on pedagogical theory were indeed quite widely recognized by his peers and very favourably reviewed in *The Publishers' Circular*, as shown by the coverage of his essay *Educational Theories* in an issue of the newspaper:[54]

> There can be no doubt that, in the main, Mr. Browning has hit the essential meaning and spirit of the work done by each of the great educational reformers, and that he has shown much skills in describing it. He is the master of a very clear, concise style, free from rhetorical ornament, but full of life and interest, and he has the art of conveying in neat, pregnant aphorisms the characteristic dogmas of the various writers of whom he gives an account—ACADEMY (68)

The depiction of his clear style was an important feature for an author of didactic materials directed to laymen, and an important selling point to emphasize. All this contributed to strengthen the cultural status of the textbook on the market, and to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, the "symbolic capital" of Browning himself. His name and credentials indeed worked as powerful, authoritative indicators of the value and worthiness of the content. In such a "cultural economy of prestige",[55] it also added to the publishers' reputation, who used it in their merchandising campaigns: as Griffith and Farran printed out lists of their most prominent educational works in the *Publishers' Circular*, they did not fail to add Browning's readers. The section of "Literary Intelligence", which opened every issue of *The Publishers' Circular* to provide its readers with a brief summary of the newspaper's content, was similarly a fair gauge of publishers' repute—being named were the leading firms of the market—and of their latest publications:

> For elementary schools, and for the English classes in all schools, . . . Messrs. GRIFFITH, FARRAN, & Co. offer several sets of books of the same class, bearing the names of well-known educational writers, including the 'New Historical Readers 'of Mr. Oscar Browning (sic—15 January 1885 3)
>
> Mr. Oscar Browning's 'Historical Readers' are prominent in the notices of Mssrs. Griffith, Farran, and Co. (16 August 1886 874)

Understandably, strategies of market-building for reading books capitalised on Browning's reputation, as shown by Griffith and Farran, in their advertisement for their set of historical reading books in the issue of 15th January 1885:

> These [Historical Readers] are the work of an eminent Historian, who has made it his

54 *The Publishers' Circular* 52:1232 (15 January 1889). *ncse.* Web. 26 January 2016.

55 I here borrow James F. English's expression, which he uses for a later period and a different, but nonetheless related subject—the ascendency of modern literary prizes (see bibliography).

> aim that the Books should be readable and should be History . . . and they will be found far superior to any set yet published for instruction, for interest, for accuracy, and for purity of style in composition. (38)

Similarly, Longmans' advertising for *Modern England* did not fail either to mention Browning's qualifications: "M.A. Senior Fellow of King's College, Cambridge"[56]—a detail included on the title page every readers and textbooks Browning authored, sometimes along with other distinctions.[57] In such a highly competitive market as that of educational publishing, reviews also called the shots and weighed heavily upon the sales, as James Walter Smith, Browning's editor at Cassel and Co., remarked:[58]

> The book [*A History of the Modern World*] was very well turned out and on the whole has received very satisfactory reviews. At the same time, there have been one or two slashing critiques[59] which, no doubt, have done the book some harm. One review in the "Observer" was terrible to hear.

Browning was also asked to add symbolic value to other authors' books in being part of the publisher's blurb. Cassel and Co. thus sent him the first volume of "Cassel National Library", English readers for which:

> We need hardly say that a word of appreciation from you will be highly esteemed by. (29 January 1886)

He was similarly approached by Edward Arnold,[60] another leading publisher of the end of the century:

> Your name is so well-known as an educational light in the school and college world that any testimony as to the merits of these books [the *Beginners' Latin Book*] coming from you would be particularly valuable to us.

The features so far described touched upon two merchandising strategies that were common in the marketing of nineteenth-century book series: "branding psychology and snob appeal" (Altick, qtd. in Weedon 99). Series that were "branded" with an editor's or a renown author's name benefited from that repute; while some readers who aspired to work their way up the social ladder aimed to improve their skills and knowledge through the acquisition of a good library—one that was constituted precisely by those who formed the elite of the nation, as was the case with Browning. The works of popular history that bore his name were thus endowed with an indisputable seal of legitimacy; but was the reverse reciprocally true? Did Oscar

56 *The Publishers' Circular* 43:1030 (16 August 1880): 17. *ncse.* Web. 26 January 2016.

57 "Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and Corresponding Member of the Société d'Histoire Diplomatique*"* (*The New Illustrated History of England*).

58 Cassel and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 1 July 1912. MS OB/1/319/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

59 Unfortunately, I have been unable to find the critiques he mentions here.

60 Edward Arnold. Letter to Oscar Browning. 21 March 1889. MS OB/1/46/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

Browning benefit, in any way, from such an occupation as popular history writing?

Writing out of necessity: Browning and the dismissal of his popular works

According to Stephen Heathorn, the relationship between publishers and the authors who belonged to the academic world, could be best described as a "win-win situation", a mutually benefiting collaboration that engendered money and cultural prestige for every side of the equation:

> a symbiotic relationship developed, wherein the publishers wanted academics to write their school books because it helped set them onto approved section lists, while academics wanted to write these books because this activity helped to justify their aspirations for professional status and the establishment of new academic disciplines. (Heathorn 17)

However, Heathorn's point might come under criticism, for it seems unlikely academics hoped to gain such a "professional status" by writing school books for elementary children.[61] As I shall argue, this at least did not apply to Oscar Browning, who was far from boasting about his popular writings, as he did, so typically, about everything else he achieved. That he found no cause to rejoice over his popular publications can be best pictured if one gets a glimpse of his financial predicament. After being sacked from Eton in 1875, Browning was left with little means of subsistence, having to rely on his small stipend as a fellow of King's College, Cambridge (£300 a year, e.g. tenth of what he earned at Eton) and a small fund—£150—that he received during three years, thanks to the generosity of friends gathered under the lead of John Seeley (Browning, *Memories of Sixty Years* 233-234). In the following years, the situation neither got worse nor improved: in spite of his resolutions to cut back on his spending habits, his lifestyle remained an important strain on his finances, as was the necessity to support his mother and sister. This precarious situation forced him to earn a living partly by his pen, juggling with multiple collaborations, constantly remaining on the lookout for potential employment, and touting for business. This can even be traced in his address to the members of the Royal Historical Society, later published as "The Teaching of History in Schools", in which he made the following conspicuous remarks:

> If proper textbooks were forthcoming, *to which I again direct the attention of*

61 An interesting vantage point from which to assess the question would be a comparison with other academic historians having published for the same market: Mandell Creighton, S.R. Gardiner, York Powell, or T.F. Tout (Heathorn 44-5). It is also worth noting Macmillan's series "A Historical Course for Schools", dubbed by the publisher "Baby Histories", and edited by E.A. Freeman, an Oxford historian scholar, during the 1870s. In Freeman's words, the purpose of the series was "to give children accurate and scientific views of history from the very first, to teach them to call things by their right names, to distinguish history from legend, to know what the sources of history are, and to distinguish the different values of different writers" (qtd. in Howsam, "Academic discipline or Literary Genre?" 535). We can see here yet another agenda.

> *enterprising publishers*, there would be no difficulty in making this subject the accompaniment of nearly every literary lesson. (my emphasis—17)
>
> A volume of genealogical tables at once full accurate and moderate in price, is still a desideration *to which I would invite the attention of publishers* . . . It would not be difficult to draw up a good quarto of this kind to be sold for five shillings, and *to do so might be an agreeable as well as useful occupation.* (my emphasis—21)

Similarly, a close reading of Browning's correspondence reveals the significant number of detailed proposals he sent to publishing houses, coming up with continual and renewed ideas of manuscripts and books—prospects that were in majority met with caution, if not clear refusal, by publishers. In spite of these rebuffs, Browning persisted and responded favourably to every other form of proposals. I have already mentioned the exchanges that quickly degenerated into bitter bargaining over money and deadlines between J.S. Virtue and Browning: this was probably the most extreme example, but a telling one, of how careless about publication and at the same time uncompromising about his salary Browning could be. While the main quality of readers and textbooks was that they were potentially long-lasting, perennial sources of income, as far as I can ascertain,[62] only Browning's *Citizen Reader* (published by Blackie and Son in 1893) provided him with such financial windfall.[63]

That Browning derived other advantages than (limited) material ones from his popular historical writings is hard to ascertain, all the more so since he himself was extremely secretive about those very writings. His *Memoir of Sixty Years at Eton, Cambridge and Elsewhere* contains no mention of these non-academic publications, and so does *Memories of Later Years*, but for the exception of *A History of the Modern World,* originally envisaged as "a History of the World, a work which I [Oscar Browning] had long contemplated and prepared for" (149). Recalling his intercourse with the house of Cassels, Browning mainly emphasized his friendship with its Chief Editor and described in great details the various schemes he envisaged—"one of which would have brought [him] in a thousand pounds" (149). However, the invisibility of his readers and his other popular works is a first hint at how Browning actually considered these publications: he publicly disregarded them—something that needs to be balanced against the flurry of letters that were exchanged in the privacy of his correspondence with publishers. The discrepancy was strikingly illustrated after the publication of his textbook *The New Illustrated History of England* (1888). Browning

62 I am here forced to rely on Ian Anstruther's biography of Browning and on Stephen Heathorn's statistical compilation of reading-book publication figures (224-229).

63 Blackie and Son's royalty reports were the only ones to be found in Browning's correspondence, testifing to the steadily-increasing sales of his civic reader. I cannot ascertain whether the other publishing houses did send him similar reports, where these are or whether their absence signal the moderate, if not poor sales of the readers.

received an infuriated letter from J.S. Virtue—another hectic height in the tumultuous relationship he entertained with the publishing house—in which the publisher urged him to explain himself: Browning had been reported telling to Cambridge undergraduates that he

> "only wrote [this] history for grocers and cheese mongers and it would be no good to them."[64]

The anecdote was plausible enough for J.S. Virtue to ask Browning for a disclaimer. This statement, real or reported, perfectly mirror Browning's uneasiness and reluctance to go public about his popular history authorship. The two spheres of high and low learning, which reflected those of the legitimate and the illegitimate, the non-commercial and the commercial cultures, had to be strictly reasserted, for the sake of his credibility as a don, even if that meant dismissing the product of his very own work. The sense of contempt that applied to the audience the book was supposed to meet ("grocers and cheese-mongers") also bans the ideal picture that one could be tempted to draw of Browning. Writing popular history was a business on which he depended as a crucial addition to his financial means; as far as his letters and autobiography show, denial and embarrassment dominated when this overlapped with other more rewarding academic ventures. In effect, the term "popular" here was equalled by Browning himself with a derogatory vision of the vulgarisation of knowledge. In his case, not assuming authorship of his popular works entailed a metaphorical ex-propriation, performed by himself, of what he owned and had himself produced.

Looking for the author

The public and seemingly careless dismissal of his work may have been rendered relatively easier for Browning, given the fact that during the making of the books themselves, he was deprived, to a significant extent, of his own authorial creative agency. Indeed, even in the realm where authors were most expected to behave freely, the scrutinising eye of publishers and editors established firm demarcations along which they were forced to move. Between what was first contained in the manuscripts and the final printed version, revisions, corrections and additions were implemented through many other agents than the author. Obviously enough, the conventions and the kind of prescriptions that weighed upon the genre of the historical reading-books made it necessary, and were so thoroughly enforced to comply with the educational codes' requirements that they tended to breed a widespread uniformity of style. To put it simply, Browning's prose could barely be distinguished from other reading book authors' style—the precise feature thanks to which an author, in the traditional sense of

64 J.S. Virtue and Co. Letter to Oscar Browning. 25 November 1891. MS OB/1/1676/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

the word, comes to be distinguished. A good example of the working of this prescriptive power and its effect can be found in the small textbook written for Longmans, Green and Co., *Modern England*, which belonged to the series *Epochs of Modern History*. Understandably, the volume needed to form a coherent part of this whole; in the words of his editor at Longmans, Mandell Creighton:[65]

> I am responsible for the political phraseology throughout and don't want each writer to use different words and phrases for the same thing.

The request could not have been clearer: Browning had to ban any idiosyncratic mark that would break the regularity and constancy of the whole series. This obviously left very little space for any claim at literary creativity—although one might argue historical readers and textbooks were not primarily meant to be such original, inventive materials. But, if, as I shall demonstrate later, they were conceived as *stories*, with their plots, twists of fortune and some of the literary ambitions that went hand in glove with them, the erasure of the authorial voice within the narrative constituted an incongruity that I shall further investigate.

Guidance to the author was not solely undertaken by the editor. Publishers had their very own readers, whose practice remains today shrouded in mystery, most notably because of their anonymity (Fritschner 45-46). Readers worked as literary advisers charged with the task of evaluating manuscripts, bearing in mind the targeted audience and the commercial interests of their publisher. In the case of educational publishing, this implied a thorough knowledge of the market: during the composition of Griffith's *Historical Reading Books*, as Browning sent his first manuscripts to the firm, he reciprocally received advice from "an experienced Teacher who has an intimate and thoroughly practical knowledge of the requirements of the schools for which your books are intended".[66] This adviser, specially recruited by the firm to monitor Browning's advance, either demanded corrections (of extracts that were deemed "unsuitable for schools")[67] or reminded him of the criteria that were to guide him in the selection of content:

> It should be a fundamental principle in the authorship, that, that which is most interesting and ennobling in English History should receive due attention. (*ibid.*)

Occurrences of such interventions repeated in the following months: one can note how, in spite of polite allowances made for his status, Browning's potential protests were quite firmly

65 Mandell Creighton. Letter to Oscar Browning. 24 April 1878. MS OB/1/423/A. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

66 Griffith and Farran. Letter to Oscar Browning. 17 May 1883. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

67 Griffith and Farran. Letter to Oscar Browning. 19 March 1883. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

"handled":[68]

> We placed the Ms. of your book I. in the hands of an Educational Expert to look out and suggest pictures for it – and to make any remarks that occurred to him with a view of exactly adapting it to the particular schools for which it is intended. And we think we cannot do better than send you his notes upon it though we do so with some hesitation lest you should think we are presumptuous in venturing to offer criticisms upon the work of an author so accomplished as yourself. But as the book is intended for a special class, with special needs and requirements, with which perhaps you would not be so familiar as those who are constantly brought into contact with it – we trust – you will accept them without taking this view of our action.

In a similar way, Pitman and Sons appointed a writer to help Browning—an adviser "whose name on the title page attaches the respect of Book Committees, School Boards, schoolmasters, etc."[69] Browning's manuscripts thus stood under the scrutiny of many different agents; his own freedom of action being limited to very narrow parts of the composition:

> We leave you in your own discretion to say what should be the proportion of space allotted to each section of the subject and whether you would sub-divide the sections into chapters or lessons in any way. (Pitman and Sons, 3 December 1900)

Browning had to remember the codes' strictly-codified dictates concerning the length of readers, something that his publishers always bore in mind:

> We very much regret to learn from yours of the 20th September that the additions to the readers will be a difficult task for you: but without them they will be absolutely useless for the Public Elementary Schools. . .
>
> We are not very particular how the deficit is supplied, so long as the matter is suitable for school children of the respective standards, and shall be glad of any suggestions as to the selection of speeches, sketches, Poetry, or of new historical matter, as noted in your letter. [70]

This snippet reveals that when content was deemed to lack, no matter the amount of internal coherence that Browning had initially constructed, or the events that he, by virtue of his "writerly" authority, had considered useless to mention, order was given to fill in the gaps. In this sense, what his correspondence tellingly reveals is the so far underestimated agency of editors' publishers, whose commercial interests were predominant in shaping texts that were also economic commodities, and who had as much mastery upon the text as the author. The latter thus occupied quite a precarious position. The key role of literary agents, who could get better terms for them, precisely started to appear during the period (with figures such as A.P.

68 Griffith and Farran. Letter to Oscar Browning. 9 May 1883. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

69 Pitman and Sons. Letter to Oscar Browning. 30 November 1900. MS OB/11285/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

70 Griffith and Farran. Letter to Oscar Browning. 3 October 1883. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

Watts, J.B. Pinker, Curtis Brown), but legislation, though it slowly improved, remained unquestionably unbalanced (Calder). Issues of copyright were indeed most often settled to the advantage of publishing houses, as Oscar Browning was to learn painfully with Griffith and Farran. The firm decided to publish a reworked version of his readers in 1886, e.g., they collated some extracts of his reading books with other writings to publish *True Stories of English History*. Obstinately claiming payment for the use of the material, Browning was quite roughly rebuffed by the firm:

> The purchase of the Copyright of the "Historical Readers" give us the absolute right to make any use we may please of the work. (30 January 1886)
>
> We have consulted the best legal authority on the subject of "Copyright" and he has furnished us with the following statement:
>
> "In my opinion you have a legal right as owners of the copyright to publish the 'True Stories from English History' in the way suggested." (13 February)
>
> In equity as well as in law, we are entitled to do absolutely as we please with the content of Historical Readers . . . Although we do not think that the question of profit or loss upon the Historical Readers should affect our rights in this matter either one way or the other, we should have a strong claim, as the Readers have involved us in very considerable loss; you will, of course, understand that we are not suggesting you are in the slightest degree responsible for this. (16 February 1886)

Griffith and Farran's reminder that the series of readers did not sell as expected is worth noting; in the author/publisher transactions of power, this obviously constituted a major bone of contention and a powerful psychological way of exerting pressure on authors. Moreover, their experimenting with the series format placed another set of constraints on the literary ability of authors with its demands of length, periodization and tone, which I shall now study in greater detail.

III. "How to tell stories to children",[71] or, the writing of popular history

If the educational codes were highly detailed in their prescriptions about the format of reading-books and tailored with great care to fit the proficiency of every standard, they remained conversely very vague about the precise way the stories within reading books had to be written. The standards of examination for Standard I. barely amounted to recommend the use of more than "words of one syllable" (Moss 56). In that respect, authors of reading-books could use all the potentialities of the genre of the story, provided it supported a lesson in reading and writing. However, when it came to historical reading-books, while history gained its scientific letters of nobility in the academic world, there arose an awkward contradiction

71 I have borrowed the phrase from Sara C. Bryant's title for her storytelling manual.

between the avowed goal of producing an entertaining narrative that would be a commercial success, and the need to relate history in the most thorough, edifying and truthful manner. The old clash between fiction and facts thus revived to be differently re-interpreted by educationists, publishers, and authors who all had their say about how English history needed to be told to elementary children. In the process, it was the very presentation of facts that came to be reflected upon to attain the utmost pedagogical efficiency.

Building the case for a picturesque story of English history

In defending the value of history as a worthy school subject, many educationists put a strong emphasis on its power to stimulate the child's imagination and develop in him, or her, the faculty to recollect events of the past as a kind of intellectual training:

> In every lesson there will be an exercise of the memory in order to store up the more important events. It will also be necessary to stimulate the learner to picture the past by an effort of the imagination. (Cowham 342)

No other discipline could create pictures or anecdotes so enduring in the mind that they lasted for a whole lifetime, as was the case with Flora Thompson, who remembered in her autobiography that:

> History was not taught formally; but history readers were in use containing such picturesque stories as those of King Alfred and the cakes, King Canute commanding the waves, the loss of the White Ship, and Raleigh spreading his cloak for Queen Elizabeth. (174)

These anecdotes constituted the common stock of images that were traditionally associated with England's past—quasi-mythical, vivid representations that recurred in almost every historical readers. It is barely surprising to notice that the narrative form appealed so much to children, and that history lent itself quite easily to such a narrativisation. In fact, especially as the youngest children were concerned, educationists did not hesitate to recommend texts that were the closest in style to fairy-tales:

> The delight which a very young child manifests in a fairy tale is an indication of the form of story which early lessons in history should assume. The power of the imagination is very strong during this period of school life. (Cowham 343)

To be noted in Cowham's appraisal of history taught as a fairy-tale is the pleasure to be derived from reading—an aspect that was altogether lacking in the classrooms of the end of the century, as lessons were directed towards the goal of securing grants, amidst what remained poor conditions of schooling. Along the same vein, Sara C. Bryant's manual[72] advocated teaching as a storytelling activity, with fairy-tales as models, provided these could

72 *How To Tell Stories To Children* (1905).

be educational, edifying and at the same time highly entertaining (13). Bryant was aware of the ambiguity at stake in using stories to tell English history—but the possible contradiction was soon solved by comparing it to the functioning of metaphors, e.g. the ability to impart "truth through the guise of images" (14). Moreover, in the case of historical readers, as learning to read went hand in hand with learning about the nation's past, authenticity and validity were simultaneously conferred to both processes (Yeandle, "Empire, Englishness" 4). Practically speaking, this translated in a picturesque story of England's past, which was one of the "two manners of teaching history" with topical teaching, and the "least mischievous" of the two (Browning, "The Teaching of History in Schools" 13). The narrative form was thus chosen accordingly, not only in readers but in textbooks and popular histories more generally, although not without some cautionary foreword, as shown by the preface of *The New Illustrated History of England*:

> While modern investigation has done away with many picturesque stories which embellished the histories of our childhood, it has also called up for us an England of the past which is more true, more vivid, and more impressive than the fabric of fancy that which it has supplanted. (vol.1)

This statement needs to be studied closely to disentangle its subtext, especially as far as the dialectical relation between story and history, here closely mingled, is concerned. Browning acknowledged the common stock of picturesque images with which every English child was acquainted (*story*), entangled in the meshes of mythical and fabular episodes ("fabric of fancy"), but claimed to go beyond them to bring to his adult readers a more powerful account of the past (*history*) compliant with the requirements of truth and enjoyment at the same time ("more true, more vivid"). He thus seemed to be trying to benefit from the scientific authority of "modern investigation", namely academic advances, while striving to keep a balance and present his readers with an attractive account as entertaining as the old ones, with the exception that he could guarantee its truthfulness. In the intersection of these two concerns—truthfulness and pleasure—indeed lay the main Gordian knot to which every author of popular historical account was—and still is—confronted, perhaps with even more sharpness in the case of Browning. Violent discredit was indeed brought upon such picturesque stories by his university peers, as shown by John R. Seeley:

> In history everything depends upon turning narrative into problems. So long as you think of history as a mere chronological narrative, so long you are in the old literary groove, which leads to no trustworthy knowledge, but only to that pompous conventional romancing of which all serious men are tired. Break the drowsy spell of narrative; ask yourself problems; your mind will at once take up anew attitude; you will become an investigator; you will cease to be solemn and begin to be serious. (201)

Romance and narration were thus decried as mythical accounts ("spell") lulling their readers into a false sense of certainty about the past, yet annihilating their analytical and critical faculties ("drowsy spell"). This statement set the standards of the official academic discipline, the "small-scale field" of the "producers for the producers" which sought mainly symbolic returns and did not rely on commercial success (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* 82). However this could not apply to popular, and in that case commercial ventures—and this Browning knew perfectly well from his publishers who would have rejected the dryness of the academic style. As his preface to *The New Illustrated History of England* shows, Browning strove to associate both the seriousness and ensuing authority of academic research, while assuring his readers that the account in question would also share some of the enjoyment to be found in semi-mythical stories of England's past. This equivocal position is reflected in the interior design of the four volumes themselves, which comprised large flowery initial letters,[73] in the manner of those to be found in illuminated manuscripts—arguably, a concession to the way most people would imagine medieval texts, and an incidental device meant to bring a semblance of authenticity to the text itself. Illustrations also obviously contributed to this picture-*sque* version of England's past, as in readers:[74] the front-cover of the reader *True Stories from English History*[75] thus lavishly mingled a gilded representation of the Royal Arms of England and a picture of a soldier in armour marching forward, on a background reproducing the symbols of England, Scotland and Ireland (roses, thistles and shamrocks). Given the advance of printing technology, illustrations certainly added material value to the text, as already shown in Griffith's blurb for its *Newbery Historical Readers*.

Narrative replication and myth-making

That historical accounts, be they popular or academic ones, can be considered as stories, or "literary artifacts" in spite of the claims of their authors to objectivity and scientificity—two terms that gained prominence as historians struggled to establish their legitimacy—has been demonstrated by Hayden White's analysis of nineteenth-century historical works.[76] According to him, what enabled historians to move beyond a mere chronicle of events is "emplotment", a term he borrows from the literary criticism of Northrop Frye, i.e., "the encodation of the

73 See illustrations 4 and 5 in the appendix.
74 See how "an ancient Briton" was depicted—illustration 6 in the appendix.
75 See illustration 7 in the appendix.
76 See 'The Historical Text As Literary Artifact' and *Metahistory.* I consciously adopt such a narrativist view of history—one that foregrounds its textual nature—in my reading of Browning's texts, given their professed proximity to *stories*. I am aware that such a reading remains highly controversial—for a discussion of White's influence, see Richard Vann's article 'The Reception of Hayden White'.

facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plots structures" ("The Historical Text" 83). The turning of historical events into a story uses the same techniques used in novels and plays: "characterization, motific repetition, variation of tones and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like" (84) and gives way to a specific plot structure and configuration which readers should normally be able to recognise. According to White, the historian makes sense of events along four main archetypal modes of emplotment, which are Comedy, Satire, Tragedy and Romance (*Metahistory* x). I will expound in further details how this applied to Browning's accounts, but I shall first underline how important such stories were for a community of readers that were brought up with them.

History books remained in print for a long time during the nineteenth-century, though under different formats—furnishing an example of "literary replication" (Howsam, *Past Into Print* 9) which Browning experienced through the re-publishing of some extracts of his readers by Griffith and Farran. Moreover, as Leslie Howsam suggests, nineteenth-century historical writings were to a large extent built on "narrative replication" (4), i.e., on the constant retelling of the very same old historical events that everyone, from the author to his readers, already knew. This resulted in the construction of a cultural universe in which everyone, since their earliest childhood, was told of "nursery stories", very often based on historically edifying anecdotes (4). In Griffith and Farran's *Newbery Historical Readers*, this could account for some of Browning's inserted remarks, by which he tended to address his imagined readers in a tone of complicity:

> It is said that he owed his introduction to court to a fortunate accident, which is, I daresay, *already known to my readers* (on Raleigh spreading his cloak for Queen Elizabeth, my emphasis—5:109)

That this should precisely be one of Flora Thompson's recollections of what had been taught to her in school is no coincidence, for this was a widespread and much loved anecdote. It also underlines another dimension of popular history: namely, that it was shared by a majority of people, who formed thereby an "imagined community" of readers, to take up a term from Benedict Anderson. The "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7) created by readership and the retelling of stories long known since childhood helped shape an audience who found a particular kind of pleasure in the (childish) repetition of events, the recognition of familiar patterns as well as that of small deviations from the established account. In a way, those stories about Britain's past seemed to function as mythical stories do:

> Tout mythe possède donc une structure feuilletée qui transparaît à la surface, si l'on peut dire, dans et par le procédé de répétition.

> Pourtant (et c'est le second point) les feuillets ne sont jamais rigoureusement identiques. S'il est vrai que l'objet du mythe est de fournir un modèle logique pour résoudre une contradiction . . . un nombre théoriquement infini de feuillets seront engendrés, chacun légèrement différent de celui qui précède. (Lévi-Strauss 254)

In reproducing the same stories, over and over, authors of historical writings tended to build a mythologised past capable of providing its readers with explanations, while framing a national past shared as a common good. In this narrative, the author truly wore the garments of the storyteller, as shown by the manner Browning—or his *alter ego* in the text—appeared:

> Many years ago, the people who lived in this land of ours were called **Britons** [sic]. I am going to tell you something about them, and I dare say you will think I am telling you a tale, very much like one of those of which you read in fairy books. (*NHR* 1:7)

What needs to be noted is first the inclusive language used by Browning ("land of ours"), which recurs throughout the readers. This "language of belonging" (Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 177) is here associated, quite blatantly, with the opening of a tale designed to be tantalizing—one can easily picture, or rather hear, the start of the oral account. Not only readers, but also histories for an adult audience seemed to strike such a tone:

> A long time ago, before history begins, England, which is now cultivated like a garden was a cold, wild country, the higher hills covered with glaciers, the plains with woods, and the river courses spreading out into swamps. (*NIHE* 1:1)

Browning here settles his account in what seems to be almost an a-historical time, set apart from conventional ordinary reality, much like the myth itself, and does not hesitate to open his four-volume long history by what clearly alludes to the opening of fairy-tales, quasi-infantilising his audience. Throughout the set of the *Newbery Historical Readers*, in a more understandable manner given the age of his readers, he used similar techniques, strongly marking his presence to sustain his readers' attention and stimulate their imagination:

> I daresay you would now like to know what these people were called. (1:31)
>
> Now I am going to tell you how the crown passed to quite another race of people. (1:50)
>
> How then he died, I will tell you in the next chapter. (5:54)

However small and futile those features seem to be, they point out to a subtext that appears to verge on the mythical. This is not to say that the events described belonged to the realm of the fictitious or the imagination, but to stress that Browning made the most of narrative techniques derived from popular childhood stories and myths—hence the strong condemnation of what academic historian saw as popular folklore, completely at odds with a modern scientific account of the past. It will be my task to investigate in what ways this storytelling mode fitted with the (often unconscious) ideological rationale behind the process

of elementary education, in order to assess their impact on readers: did the simplistic, often Manichean worldview of the fairytale also apply to those renderings of England's history? If, as Roland Barthes argues in *Mythologies*,[77] myth can be described as the process which simplifies and "naturalizes" facts, making them look as unproblematic, neutral truths, what preconceptions and manners of thinking were thus transmitted, consciously or not, to elementary school children? However, before analysing the content of those popular histories *per se*, I shall have a look at the manner those narrative techniques tallied with the most serious pedagogical reasoning about the presentation of moral lessons.

Painting the history of England in concentric circles

In an educational system where children could leave school after passing Standard IV—the school leaving age was successively raised to 11 in 1893 and to 12 in 1899—it was thought essential to provide for the first standards a narrative that would cover the whole period of English history. This was one of the preoccupations that Griffith and Farran's reader presented to Browning:

> The question to be considered in connexion with the History Readers is this: is the series to be brought out in Sections (e.g. Ancient English History for Standard III, Middle period for Standard IV, Modern Period for Standard V), or, in successive coats of paint – at it were – (e.g. Stories of great deeds or about great men,[78] for Standard III, and anecdotal history for Standard IV, a more detailed and systematic history for Standards V and VI)? (sic—Letter to Oscar Browning, n.d.)[79]

The image of the "successive coats of paint" is pregnant with meaning, and aptly mirrors the narrative replication at work within those types of work; it also is in tune with the mainstream view underpinning the educational culture of the late nineteenth-century. As argued by Peter Yeandle, pedagogical developments in England were at this time heavily influenced by the teaching principles of Johann Friedrich Herbart, as he started to be translated in England and infused practices advocated in teaching manuals (*Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 53). Browning himself prefaced the 1892 translation of Herbart's *The Aesthetic Revelation of the World*, as well as an *Introduction to Herbart's Science and Practice of Education*, though he remained careful in the latter not to endorse every Herbartian views.[80] The Herbartian proponents were particularly keen on promoting the

77 "Nous sommes ici au principe même du mythe : il transforme l'histoire en nature" (236).

78 I will refer to this "Great Men" theory of history in my third chapter.

79 Enclosed in the correspondence between Griffith and Farran and Oscar Browning. MS OB/1/694/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

80 "Herbart's own treatment of the questions of government and discipline is not very satisfactory, nor are the difficulties inherent in them cleared up by his successors" ("Preface to *Introduction to Herbart's Science and Practice of Eduction*" vi).

concentric method, i.e. a first approach of English history in its outline, then a succession of approaches focusing on details and individuals, still spanning the whole chronology of Britain's past. In doing so, every child was sure to have had at least a general view of Britain's past, and in the case of replication from one year to the next, the technique was considered to favour recapitulation, a key concept of Herbartian pedagogy. Recapitulation indeed enabled the child to compare between different historical periods, inducing from it a sense of progress over time, not only in material conditions but in morals too. Additionally, as the form of the story implies, the history of Britain was explained as a continuous, unquestioned development that was interpreted as a progress, in the vein of the Whig approach to history (Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 60-61). This method was the one chosen by Browning in the *Newbery Historical Readers*: the first two volumes covered the period from 55 B.C. to 1887; the third one accounted for the Roman times up to Wellington's defeat of Napoleon; the fourth one told "Twenty stories and Biographies from 1066 to 1485", while the fifth, sixth and seventh volumes respectively dealt with the Tudor, the Stuart and the Hanoverian periods in greater details. The level of difficulty varied according to the age of the pupils, as the first "Simple stories" transformed into the more elaborated subject matter of the last volumes, which were interspersed with poems and biographies of "famous men" of the period. Together with this ordering of chronology is to be noted the recurring use of biographies, a feature strongly promoted by educationists, as well as Herbartian advocates, as the surest way to engage children emotionally and to stir in them the desire to emulate the great deeds of heroic male figures.[81]

> Biography is too much neglected, and its value as an adjunct to history too little regarded among schoolmasters. Yet every one knows how much more attractive is the life of a person than the history of mere events. (Fitch 345)

From one reader to the next, the soldiers, diplomats, sailors, as well as eminent writers that were chosen for moral emulation barely changed and were anything but unexpected: I shall now proceed to study the ideology that conditioned their presence within the texts, through a number of case studies.

81 Some very rare exceptions involved women, a fact to which I shall pay more attention in the last part of this paper; but all accounts remained strongly gendered-biased, leaning towards a history of great *men*.

CHAPTER THREE – Opinions and "images for confident control"[82]

> There is a process which I call the selective tradition: that which, within the terms of the effective dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'. (205)
>
> – Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"

In the analysis of a given dominant culture and of its ideological assertions, education signals the legitimate, accepted and authorized vision that one group imposes and enforces through the choice of subject matter. This represents the "selective tradition" described by Raymond Williams, who highlighted the hegemonic power—to allude to Gramsci's concept which Williams endorsed—inherent in the construction of a certain reality, a certain past, and the transmission of chosen skills considered as important knowledge, not only by education, but by a whole philosophical and cultural environment.

As a fundamental conservative force[83] shaped to maintain pre-existing relations of power, the prescriptive power of education is of particular interest for a study of the images conveyed to young pupils. That the educational system contributed to shape certain assumptions about Britain's past, about its "mission" in the world, constructing images of the "other" to assert its identity, is the premise from which I aim to work; but since I cannot accurately assess the extent to which those texts were successful in inculcating those images, I shall concentrate on how the "experience of the nation" (Heathorn 23) was shaped and then transmitted to young pupils. While I am aware of the "receptive fallacy" (Rose 4) that would make one study texts rather than those who read them, I think Erving Goffman's concept of "frame" offers a helpful nodal point around which an analysis can develop: every reader is endowed with frames, i.e. "basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events" (10) that flexibly channel one's access to reality. If one considers education as precisely one of those frames, adults taught in elementary schools could react either positively to their primary instruction—endorsing the main assertions of what they were taught to believe—or rebel against what they saw as propaganda. But in either case, they had first to process and incorporate this teaching, in order to come to terms with it—and in a majority of cases, they never managed to entirely escape from the meshes of the "language of the nation", which,

82 Mangan ("Images for Condident Control").
83 See Bourdieu's 'The School as a Conservative Force: Scholastic and Cultural Inequalities.'

according to Heathorn, translated in the First World War mass-mobilisation (20-21). At the same time, because education was but one frame among others,[84] I acknowledge that readers "reinvented" texts which were dynamically constructed and re-read, and that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve the "structures of feeling" (Williams, *The Country and the City* 12) they created. My aim is therefore to focus primarily on the rhetoric of national unity at work in Browning's popular historical accounts, and on the ensuing images and tropes of language, the "root-metaphors", that recurred in their discourse, i.e., the "explanatory models that allow their members [of the same culture] to make acceptable sense of the world" (Mangan, "Images for Confident Control" 7). In doing so, one risks to replicate the kind of omissions and authoritative positions—e.g. the white, male, Anglo-Saxon point of view—given as the norm against which "others" were measured, compared and assessed. I shall nonetheless strive to study this authoritative discourse of power in order to describe the aims sought in this inclusive representation of the British nation.

I. Progress, civilization and continuity: a celebration of English national character

Although curriculum content was not subjected *per se* to state regulation, as shown by the absence of any such rulebook in education circulars, publishers and writers had to follow certain principles in order to expect reasonable coverage and avoid being banned from school boards' lists of recommended readers. For instance, they carefully avoided to adopt any religious bias and aimed at neutrality in political opinions. This was clearly highlighted in Griffith and Farran's advertisement for the *Newbery Historical Readers*: "They [the readers] are equally suited for Board Schools and for Voluntary Schools. No political or religious views are contemned [sic]: none specially approved" (38).[85] In this sense, commercial considerations contributed to censorship of opinions, because readers and school books, to be marketable, were to conform to the general consensus around the contemporary political system, banning radical political or religious ideas. Similarly, Browning's popular histories for an adult audience strove to avoid making waves and were deeply imbued by the same underlying purpose of promoting national unity. Scrutinizing these texts, I shall first demonstrate how this consensus was deeply tangled up to an inclusive discourse about race[86]

84 Goffman's term also helpfully balances Gramsci's notion of hegemonic ideology, which, despite its relevance, should not lead to a dogmatic perspective—*interpretations* being anything but straightforward (see my point on Denis Butts' argument below). In Kelly Boyd's words, such texts "helped shape world-views, but did not totally determine them" (6).

85 *The Publishers' Circular* 47:1136 (15 January 1885): 2. *ncse.* Web. 24 February 2016.

86 I shall be using the term "race" in its widespread nineteenth-century sense, i.e.,as a system of classification of mankind whose authority was grounded on supposedly scientific inquiries, which put forward anthropological justifications to account for human diversity, while acknowledging that it is a historically

and origins.

Race and identity: the semantics of being English

The rhetoric of national belonging is very clearly deployed throughout Browning's texts, with a nodal point fixed on the Anglo-Saxon race—in that respect, the books were entirely consistent with the obsession of the Victorians for their ancestors, as well as with the theory of social Darwinism, that envisaged societies and races as products of a process of natural selection. Mingled to this subtext, there also appeared a recurrent emphasis on traits of appearance and character that borrowed from physiognomy, a pseudo-science which postulated a relation between physical features and indication of one's character. Browning's writings overflowed with such descriptions: in doing so, he contributed to create and essentialize a proto-typical English character, whose physical attributes were reduced to a simplistic handful of characteristics, as shown in the following episode about British slaves in Rome:

> These pretty white children, with blue eyes and fair hair, had come from **Britain . . .** After looking at them for a long time, he [a passing monk] said that they should be called **Angels** and not **Angles** [sic]. (*NHR* 1:33-34)

When dealing with prominent rulers, Browning similarly stressed their physical characteristics in accordance to their origins and character:

> Rufus had courage and ability, but no moral principles. He was a large stout man with light hair and a red face. He had a broad forehead standing out in large bosses.

The similarity with the practices and descriptions of physiognomy, dealing with the proportions of the human face, and phrenology, associating mental faculties to bumps on a particular part of the head, is striking. After having brought out physical evidence of the king's unworthiness, Browning indeed passed judgement:

> His voice was loud, and he stammered when he was angry. He was one of the worst kings England ever had. (*NIHE* 1:47)

At the other end of the spectrum, meliorative assessments worked along the same lines:

> [Edward I] proved to be one of the greatest kings that ever reigned in England. He was tall and strong, with a broad chest, and had in his appearance a union of the Norman and Saxon character. (*NHR* 4:59-60)

Interestingly enough, Edward I literally em-bodies the alliance of two powerful and

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dynamic notion, constructed as contacts with the empire increased (Hall and Rose, 7) i.e., not an "essential" category, as commonly accepted in the nineteenth century. Sometimes unconscious, sometimes intentional, the use of the concept of race by reader authors was meant to "mark out the imagined genealogical territory of English identity" (Heathorn 87). For a wider discussion of race sciences in the nineteenth century, especially after Darwin, see N. Stepan's *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*.

admired races: the Saxon race which merged with the Normans after the battle of Hastings, along the lines of the social Darwinian narrative of racial strengthening after a ruthless struggle for survival. Such a device also highlighted the primacy of roots and bloodline in the constitution of a powerful monarchy, taken as a representing the nation at large, steadily fortifying itself with the best qualities of its ancestors. Those qualities were described as fixed traits, as universal and immoveable features of a great race:

> The English were essentially a war-like nation. Their natural field for fighting was the sea, but they were not less given to fighting on land. (*NIHE* 1:10)
>
> They [Britons] were a brave and simple people who loved their country; bold in the chase and very brave in war. (*NHR* 1:10)

The obvious parallel uniting the two passages—the attribution of a valiant character to Britain's first denizens—had subtle echoes throughout history, especially in the explanation of Britain's expansion and conquest. They also resonated peculiarly for contemporary readers, impelled to measure against the original model of their forefathers. Those characteristics ended up merging in an essential core that formed the nation's identity. In Browning's histories, this translated in a simplified version of social Darwinism that elaborated upon the idea of different races coming together (the Angles, the Jutes, the Saxons), absorbing the worthiest of all (the Danes, the Normans) and rejecting "others" (Celtic people) at the boundaries of the country. In his own words, "we have the power of absorbing new peoples into ourselves", as part of "our national character" (*PKEHR* 212)—a character thus imperial from the outset of its history.

In fashioning such a national identity which stemmed from the earliest times of the country, Browning also created powerful counter-images, designed to provide a negative, diffracted vision that could helpfully serve as a repulsive "other" against which to unite; this process underlined "the differences between 'us' and 'them'. And there is no more effective way of bonding together the disparate sections of a restless people than to unite them against outsiders" (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism* 91). Understandably enough, foreigners helped justify a sense of national belonging and polarized negative judgements. The example of Henry III, taken by Browning in the third volume of *The Newbery Historical Reader*, is worth quoting in full here:

> Although the Great Charter was a step toward liberty, England was not safe from the rule of a weak or bad king. Such a king was Henri [sic] III, the eldest son of John, who succeeded his father. *He was more a Frenchman than an Englishman*. He spent a great deal of money, and *filled the country with foreigners*. (my emphasis—45)

Browning's rejection of Henry III on the ground of his origins (his mother was Isabella of Angoulême) was a simple, yet very effective way to arouse patriotic feelings in the face of such an out-landish, unnatural king. However, the argument became an ambiguous puzzle when the "others" were defined as the Welsh, Scottish or Irish people, of Celtic origins. It is worth noting that designations of the national community constantly wavered between "English" and "British", with a clear predominance of the first term, and a marked preference for the ideas of "Englishness". In the same set of readers, Browning could thus talk indifferently of the "English Empire" (*NHR* 2:103) as well as of the "British Empire" (*NHR* 7:179). The Welsh in particular, defined by their Celtic roots, loomed indistinctly on the fringes of Browning's picture of the past, enacting a micro-version of the relations between a centre and its periphery:

> They [The Welsh] were the descendants of the Britons, who, on the conquest of the island, had been driven into these mountain fortresses. They were of Celtic origin, and it may be mentioned that welsh is a term always given to people of Celtic origin by their German neighbours. (*NHR* 4:60)

Browning indeed focused almost exclusively his history on "the English in England", to take up the title of a chapter (*NIHE* 7:1). The overall amount of pages in Browning's texts that were allocated to the history of Wales, Scotland and Ireland fared very poorly in comparison to the overwhelming history of England.[87] In fact, their relegation to the confines of the England nation coincided with their textual marginalisation—something most blatantly illustrated by the text Browning wrote for Pitman's readers, *The Evolutionary History of England, its People and Institution.* While originally having allocated three different parts to Wales, Scotland and Ireland, he then received the advice from his publisher to amalgamate them as "Britain history outside England", in "no more than ten pages of letterpress".[88] Perhaps even more tellingly, in the seventh volume of the *Newbery Historical Reader*, the union of the four parts constituting Great Britain was accounted for by Browning in a chapter entitled "The Growth of the British Empire": the idea of England having colonised, overpowered and subjected "foreign" possessions also applied to their neighbours in the British Isles. This narrative established the superiority of English racial identity, but how could pupils who were not English, but Welsh, Scottish or Irish, identify with an account that was supposedly meant to promote a sense of national belonging? In theory, the capacity of English character for racial assimilation meant that all could participate in English values,

87 This was in fact a feature shared both by academic and popular histories until the recent historiographical turn (1970s-80s) towards a more inclusive history of the "four nations" of the British Isles.

88 Pitman and Sons. Letter to Oscar Browning. 20th June 1901. MS OB/1/1285/C. King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

provided they recognised England's superiority and right to speak for them. Along the same line, when accounting for the unions with Wales or Scotland, Browning managed to make allowances for positive racial characteristics that could be a happy adjunct to English national identity:

> There is no doubt that both countries have profited by the measure. The industry and thrift of the Scottish character have enabled them to take full advantage of the opening which England supplies to enterprise . . . and yet the independence of their national character has not been lost. (*NHR* 7:13)

The English racial ideal stayed at the centre of a process of assimilation which delineated the limits of the pupils' nationality and enclosed it in the meshes of Englishness. This ideal also constructed a sense of historical continuity that was crucial in the inculcation of reverence for English inherited institutions.

Progress and continuity

The racial characteristics of the founders of England were not praised for their own sake, but were obviously deemed as worthy of emulation for their descendants. Additionally, they testified to England's consistency and stability through the ages:

> No nation exhibits a more persistent unity of character and purpose than ours, so that an Englishman of the present day is in many respects an Englishman of a thousand years ago. This unity, which is the salient feature of English history, whilst it should inspire us with a strong interest in the past, will also furnish us with hope and confidence for the future. (*NIHE* 1:preface)

As already hinted before, the nation's greatness was charted back to its ancient racial substrate:

> Happily for us, the constitution of England was formed by a union of these two principles. From the Normans we get our strong and wise central government, from Saxons forefathers our sturdy local institutions. (*NIHE* 1:256)
>
> The laws and customs of the English affect us at the present day. (*NHR* 3:16)

This position was entirely consistent with the contemporary Whig emphasis on English constitutional history, wedded to racial considerations. The explanations hinged on the narrative of the rights and freedoms gained by every Englishmen through constitutional reform, as was more flagrantly epitomized by the Great Charter, depicted as “one of the chief causes why England is more prosperous and happy than other countries” (*NHR* 3:44), or “the act of the united nation” (*NIHE* 1:110). As such, Browning was infused with the ideas of the influential Oxford historian Stubbs, the great constitutionalist, as well as by those of his friend, John R. Seeley, who acknowledged that history was primarily centred around the

"English state", and

> in what direction and towards what goal has that been advancing? The words which jump to our lips are Liberty, Democracy! (8)

If it accounted for England's greatness, this lineage was also intended to trigger commitment to the ongoing good march of the nation. This was particular clear in the conclusions of readers, which consisted in a retrospective look upon the lessons learnt:

> It is certain, therefore, that the England we live in is stronger, happier, and better than the England of our forefathers. It remains with us to maintain this progress, and to hand down the heritage we have received unimpaired to our children. (*TSEH*, 356—the conclusion was copied from the seventh volume of *The Newbery Historical Reader*)

> You have read how the **Romans** came and made the land their own . . . Then came the **Saxons** to help the **Britons** to drive back the **Picts and Scots** . . . I hope, too, that you will think of the famous soldiers and sailors of whom you have read, and remember the good that each did for the country in which you now live, and which they helped to make so great.

> Many hundred years have passed between the years of the poor **Britons**, who lived wild in the forests, and the time of the last battle which ended the **War of the Roses**, but through all these years, England has been slowly but surely forming herself into one of the greatest countries of the world. (sic—*NHR* 1:100-101)

What needs to be noted is that Browning acknowledged the passing of time—he did not provide his readers with an immoveable vision of England whose characteristics would have remained unaltered, but with a picture hinging on the idea of progress over time. The most brutal traits of the English race were adapted to the new challenges of the late Victorian, and Edwardian times. For instance, the initial ruthlessness and savagery of the first English disappeared from their descendants, while the latter retained their courage and seafaring experience. In fact, Browning was extremely careful in sowing hints about the progress of England, in fostering in his readers' minds a sense of historical distance that enabled them to measure by themselves their country's successful development, from an early savage state to a more advanced stage of civilisation. I shall reproduce only a handful of those hints here:

> A long time ago, before history begins, England, which is now cultivated like a garden was a cold, wild country, the higher hills covered with glaciers, the plains with woods, and the river courses spreading out into swamps. (*NIHE* 1:1)

> Now you will see . . . [they] were not at all like we are now in their manners and customs. They did no live as we do, they did not dress as we do, and yet they were a brave and simple people. (*NHR* 1:10)

> The island, now the centre of the commerce of the world, was then far removed from the ways of men. The country, which we see tilled like a garden, was covered with thick forests full of wild animals. (*NHR* 3:11)

The depiction of contemporary England as an ordered and well cared-for garden carried much symbolical weight from about the 1880s, according to Raymond Williams, who argued that such a rural setting, taken to be representative of "home" as a "memory and an ideal", gained particular prominence in the imagination of the English people (*The Country and the City* 281): in the common unconscious, such an image was contrasted to the hostile, alien and dangerous colonial settlements. Additionally, the reference enabled Browning to encourage the child to compare several historical periods—hence the overwhelming use of comparatives in the second quote—in order conclude in favour of his contemporary situation, as demanded by the concentric method. In assessing the importance of the nineteenth century within its textbook on modern history, Browning similarly declared:

> It is with few exceptions a time of peace, of quiet, steady internal progress. It represents a nation resting from the exertions of a mighty past to grow strong for the trial of a momentous future . . . These change have all followed quietly and naturally one upon another, so that they look like growth rather than change. (*Modern England* "Introduction")

The highlighting of the idea of a natural, smooth growth of the nation also implicitly refuted the idea that historical change ought to be brought up radically, i.e., by revolution, as the negative counter-image of France seemed to imply. Popular history authors took it upon themselves to give prominence not only to those violent agents of change that sailors and soldiers best represented, but also in the deeds of industrious individuals who contributed to their nation's advance. Caxton and the printing press, or Arkwright inventing the spinning jenny thus featured prominently in the national narrative, as individuals who "helped to make England the greatest country in the world" (*NHR* 2:98). However, a question remained: how was this narrative of progress mobilized to appeal to an audience who would probably never have the opportunity to imitate the likes of Nelson or Arkwright?

Dedication to the community and the country

For elementary schoolchildren who mostly came from humble backgrounds,[89] there existed the risk that a discrepancy could arise between the so-called "progress of England" (*NHR* 7:101), the deeds of great men and kings fighting for their country and the still squalid conditions they were experiencing day after day, even in the schoolrooms. Dedication to the greater good of the national community was yet put forward by reader authors. Pressing reminders that the future of the nation lay in the children's hands were numerous:

> England reaped to the full the fruits of her devotion to duty. No nation in Europe has

89 In their letters to Browning, his publishers clearly targeted the market of elementary schools.

> experienced so uninterrupted a career of prosperity and growth. (*NHR* 7:101)
>
> It is certain, therefore, that the England we live in is stronger, happier and better than the England of our grandfathers. It remains with us to maintain this progress, and to hand down the heritage we have received unimpaired to our children. (*NHR* 7:103)

National duty, here signalled by the reference to England's forefathers, was the byword to be found in countless passages and in their solemn conclusion; taken to be the reason for England's prosperity, the assurance of its continuation was to be the guarantee of the nation's survival. Working from that premise, which appealed to the child's reason and sense of duty, schoolbooks' authors also strove to foster emotional attachment to the country by using similes equating it to a family. By doing so, they amalgamated gendered pedagogical and social discourses to flesh out the claims they made about the dedication to be expected from every dutiful child and future citizen. As already noted, imperial history was deeply structured along perceptions of gender differences, with the foregrounding of active male characters discovering, conquering, subduing and administering the foreign possessions of England. In that narrative, femininity and family were given a prominent place as metaphors for the relation of the individuals to their country. This could be sensed in Browning's previous quote: the sole fact of using terms alluding to this extended family, such as "grandfathers", "children", "heritage" was a device quite common in the language of history readers, and all the more so since the continuity of England's characteristics was guaranteed by "blood"—ancestry and bloodline. Further down the thread of the family metaphor, England had a significant import as the motherly, watchful guide of its infant colonies:

> [It was] felt by every reflecting observer that the tie which bound this great organism together derived its strength not from force, or self-interest, or jealousy of other nations, but from the spirit of liberty and self-government which made every part of the great political body vibrate with a like intensity of life to that which animated the heart of the free Mother Country herself, and that neglect or ignorance of this would mean ruin and decay. (*HMW* 4:489)

Arguably the idea of the metropole as the "mother country" was far from being a brand new one, but it added up to the cluster of images personalising Britain and attributing to it feminine qualities, as a static entity responsible for the maintaining of the existing order. In that narrative, its monarch occupied pride of place in the national imagining—this was the case especially for Victoria, whose reign symbolically marked the culmination of England's might. Let it be remarked that such a prominence in history readers for a female figure was quite unusual. Even Elizabeth I, whose reign triggered off the great expansion of England overseas, found herself overshadowed by the "sea-dogs" such as Raleigh and Drake. However, Victoria's import was slightly different: while figures of ancient sovereigns were

approached with more critical a stance, she was the subject of unanimous praise in readers and textbooks (Chancellor 41), her role being explained through the lens of motherhood. For instance, in the following extract which examined Victoria's relation to India on the occasion of her death, her feminine qualities loomed predominantly:

> She was reverenced as a just and beneficent ruler, but still more as *a fruitful mother* of sovereigns and princes, for she exhibited *the virtues of maternity* which impress the imagination of the East with singular effect. To *every child* in that vast country it seemed as if a shadow had fallen upon the land and the sun had been darkened in the heavens. (my emphasis—*HMW* 4:492)

In addition to the exaggerated simile of the mourning of the land itself, which alludes to the ancient image of the monarch as an all-powerful ruler, one can note how the Indian people is constructed as an easy prey to such a female figure of power—a hint perhaps, at the essential infantile character they were deemed to possess, as opposed to the virile, masculine ethos of the British colonisers. Moreover, portraying Victoria as a paragon of fecundity and female virtues sustained the model that invited children to assimilate family structures to the nation, strengthening their emotional identification to the national community. Playing on this affective connection, educationists emphasized the need for the individual to devote oneself entirely to the collectivity—this constituted the ultimate goal of the Herbartian method (Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 123). It was explained with very pragmatical ends in mind by Collar and Crook:

> History affords many examples of noble self-sacrifice for one's country . . . The teacher must indicate practical means of giving expression to the patriotic sentiment lest the very boys who dream of emulating Arnold von Winkelried by gathering a sheaf of the enemy's spear points into their own bosoms, grow into men who cheat their country by making false income tax-returns. (184)

Taking tax-dodge as a line of argument helped stress the minor incivilities that allegedly endangered the social fabric and put the national cohesion in jeopardy; it also sought to emphasize the everyday good code of conduct that contributed to the nation's greatness. In that sense, schoolbook authors had to encourage obedient and law-abiding attitudes within these citizens-in-the-making, as a prime example of how one could effectively serve one's country. Other facets of the adhesion to the nation's values, as varied as industry, a liking for learning, or sacrifice of the self in favour of the collective were consistently elaborated upon in the texts and transmitted as values within the reach of the audience. Browning particularly relished the figure of the ancient king Alfred, upon whom he heaped praise as a “hard-working man” who “set an example to his subjects by doing everything that he wished them to do” (*NHR* 3:22-23). Remembering him for his good government, Browning also turned

him into an apt model for everyday emulation:

> When King Alfred was quite a little boy, he had a great wish to learn how to read. But books were very few in numbers and very dear to buy . . .
>
> I hope that you will all try to become like Alfred, and grow up wise and good. Learn when you are young, and do not forget, that you can never learn too much. (*NHR* 1:37-39)

Incidentally, Browning invited his young readers to reflect upon the value of the education they received, by evoking the training of a glorious, exemplary king: doing well at school would not only be a reward to the individual child, but to the national community as well, a token of wisdom and of a sound moral conduct. With this sententious injunction, Browning clearly envisaged education through the lenses of national obligations and social duties which each child ought to discharge with compliance. Similar passages extolled the advantages of literacy by presenting it as a token of progress, for example when looking with sympathy upon the living conditions of the first (ignorant) Britons:

> These poor people knew no better. They had no schools to which they must go, and they would neither read nor write. (*NHR* 1:9-10)

The logical conclusion drawn by pupils after reading the sentence would supposedly have led them to measure their own luck of being educated, and freed from the veil of ignorance in which their ancestors remained shrouded. Moreover, added to the example of some unexceptional individuals (most notably inventors) attaining greatness by partaking in the common good of the community, famous English heroes were depicted as prominent only because prominently supported by followers—a second rank apt to fit working-class boys and girls. This idea was explicitly developed by another schoolbook author, John Finnemore, in his 1901 reader *Famous Englishmen*, later known as the "pedestal metaphor":

> In every age we may call the great man the statue, and the people who supported him the pedestal. Few people in our time will become statues, but we can all take our share in forming a firm pedestal in support of a great leader and a great cause. (3-5)

In his assessment of a particular historical periods, Browning indeed did not fail to underline the role of both the undistinguishable "people" and the prominent figures of rulers:

> But the good sense and patriotism of the English people supported the Minister. (*HMW* 4:309)

Class frustrations could thus be channelled under the inclusive blanket of the nation; a sense of superiority being constructed from narratives of ancestry encoded in the language of race and from the belief of having reached the finest stage of progress. The rhetoric fosterered a typical English identity at the expense of other extraneous origins. However, to make any

lasting impression on the pupils' minds, those narratives needed to be fleshed out with colourful characters, a literal "cast" which I will now study in relation to the way the British Empire was described.

II. The cast of the Empire

In the long account of England's headway, some space had to be allotted to the justification of the process of conquest and colonisation that had led England to possess one of the most powerful empires in Europe in the nineteenth century. Imperialism, one's pride and firm belief in the righteousness of the empire, was closely tied up to the rhetoric of patriotism, racial superiority and national destiny. Catherine Hall precisely described the process that created "anatomies of difference" (*Civilising Subjects* 16) that foregrounded racial types and permitted classification, hierarchisation and domination—a trinity necessary for imperial thinking to function and justify its actions. However straightforward that might seem, this cluster of images differed slightly according to the age of the audience for which it was intended; with justifications of conquest and colonisation varying in tone as well as content, leaving room sometimes for partisan criticisms. "Great men" were the pivots upon which such narratives could hinge: Carlyle's famous maxim that "the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here", as "modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain" (21) certainly had a lasting influence on popular historical accounts and on the manner those texts recounted biographies of prominent male[90] individuals, seen as embodying the spirit of an age, or depicted as heroes. I shall pay attention to those master narratives, as well as to the rare subordinate ones that staged women and those who did not partake in the established "white, male, English" pattern.[91]

Plots of war and empire-builders

The progressive establishing of the empire was primarily explained by depicting the agency of enterprising individuals who had pushed away the boundaries of England's territory, and had administered the colonies. Very often, those "empire-builders" came to embody a part of the empire: India "was" Clive and Hastings, Australia Cook, the Sudan Gordon.[92] This cast

90 It is worth noting that such a history was strongly gendered-biased, excluding (with very few exceptions) women from British history.

91 Having to restrict my analysis to a few case-studies, it is my aim to turn my attention to the territories situated in Asia, Australia and Africa, where "strangeness" and alienation were at their highest between colonisers and colonised, to study the kind of discourse deployed about the native people of those lands. I will thus voluntarily omit North America from this exploration.

92 This "heroic" conception remains a lasting and popular approach in history.

was articulated to a pattern that, to a certain extent, can be seen as following the comic plot—a mode of figurative discourse borrowed from Frye's critical analysis of plot structures by Hayden White (“The Historical Text” 83). Comedy organises a sequence of events from an initial disrupting event, or disorderly change, to the final triumph of man, symbolized by rites of celebration and the re-establishment of the social and natural order. This generic plot could account for momentary periods of crisis or disruptive outbursts—the Indian Mutiny probably being the most blatant example of this—that threatened English rule, and allowed those contradictions to be overcome in happy endings intended to confirm English superiority. This tallied with what Robert MacDonald called “plots of war” (26), i.e., an historical storyline that unfolded itself around military achievements: an initial conquest of the land by pioneers and missionaries, the ensuing submission of the natives, with the help of the military, and a long-lasting settlement in a then pacified country under a new rule and new political structures (27). Let us now take a closer look at Browning's texts to see if they stood in accordance with such a codified pattern. While omitting the violence at stake in the taking of new lands, Browning decidedly chose to shed light on the gains that such conquests brought to England. He thus described Walter Raleigh, who, together with Drake, opened the routes of the sea to England, embodying the nation's thirst for expansion and conquest:

> As a navigator, soldier, statesman, and historian, his name is honourably connected with one of the most brilliant periods in English history. (*NHR* 5:113)

It is extremely interesting to find in this description what I may call the “holy trinity” of the imperial hero: “navigator, soldier, statesman”, Raleigh seemed to prefigure and embody all the roles that the English coloniser was later to take on, as well as the great prestige that the national community derived from one of its most daring hero—a sailor at that, a detail which had a crucial significance for Britain, whose might was primarily built on its naval forces. In the third volume of the *Newbery Historical Reader*, England's naval superiority, was made the subject of a poem, “Ye Gentlemen of England”: “If enemies oppose us / When England is at war / With any foreign nation, / We fear not wound nor scar / Our roaring guns shall teach 'em / Our valour for to know, / Whilst they reel on the keel / And the stormy winds do blow.” (88) The value and effect of those little pieces of poetry shall not be underestimated: they powerfully contributed to fix images in the mind and imagination of young pupils who were very often charged with learning them by heart. That those images were lasting imprints is shown by F. H. Spencer, who recalled a particular history reader that had marked him:

> From its historic pages I learned my first poem. Everybody did. It was 'Little Jim', that cheerful set of verses which begins. . .

> The night was stormy / The wind was howling wild / A patient mother knelt behind / The death-bed of her child.
>
> But this did not depress our youthful spirits, rather it 'struck a chord' in our hearts: the same chord, no doubt, which accounts for the sentimental musical proclivities of the common soldier in the war, for many of them were nurtured on this type of English verse. (52)

Spencer's testimony helps us understand how young pupils could imaginatively and emotionally relate to constructions that enhanced ideas of self-sacrifice and patriotism. Lyric exaltation of martial themes successfully managed—arguably more successfully than ordinary lessons and tales—to convey ideas about the appropriate role little boys had to fulfil if they wanted to actively defend their country.[93] Other doggerels in the *Newbery Historical Readers* extolled quite blatantly, without much subtlety, similar martial imagery:

> 'Twas the battlefield, and the cold pale moon / Looked down on the dead and dying / And the wind passed o'er with a dirge and a wail / Where the young and the brave were lying. / With his father's sword in his red right hand, / And the hostile dead around him / Lay a youthful chief, but his bed was the ground / And the grave's icy sleep had bound him. ("The Sword" 3:92)

In this poem, the "father's sword" symbolically stands for the duty to defend the glorious national legacy. Similarly, the poem "Aspirations of Youth" is worth quoting at length, for it neatly encapsulates the whole set of prescriptions heaped on young boys' shoulders:

> Higher, higher will we climb / Up the mount of glory, / That our names may live through time / In our country's story; / Happy, when her welfare calls, / He who conquers, he who falls.
>
> Deeper, deeper let us toil / In the mines of knowledge; / Nature's wealth and learning's spoil / Win from school and college; / Delve we there for richer gems / Than the stars of diadems.
>
> Onward, onward may we press / Through the path of duty; / Virtue is true happiness, / Excellence true beauty; / Minds are of celestial birth, / Make we then a heaven of earth.
>
> Closer, closer let us knit / Hearts and hands together, / Where our fireside comforts sit / In the wildest winter,— / Oh, they wander wide who roam / For the joys of life from home. (3:70)

Strikingly enough, this poem represents a good picture of the social and cultural prescriptions so far evoked: the highlighting of self-sacrifice, the importance of learning and industry, the sentimental association with one's home, together with a pervasive martial imagery. Soldiers and the military had indeed their fair share of praise in historical readers,

93 Other popular media simultaneously conveyed an array of powerful images on manliness, the most influential ones being the boys' papers, typified by the high-circulating *The Boys' Own Paper*, founded in 1879 (see Kelly Boyd's *Manliness and the Boy's Story Paper in Britain*).

reflecting the broader late-Victorian and Edwardian fascination for "the man of action, the warrior-hero" (Paris, 44). Those who fought against Britain's arch-enemy, France, were even more likely to be awarded pride of place, as was the case with Clive. In historical accounts, the snatching of India from France's reach constituted an achievement that Clive's subsequent pacifying of India, after the infamous incident of the "Black Hole of Calcutta", managed to sustain. Browning's simplified version of it for the second volume of the *Newbery Historical Readers* elusively emphasized the successful chain of events:

> [Clive] fought the French in many battles, and gained the victory over them, until he almost drove them out of the land. About this time one of the native princes of India tried to turn the English out of his country . . . Clive was sent to punish this man. This he did; he fought a great battle with him, killed many of his soldiers and took away his lands. Since that time, the English have been masters in India. (*NHR* 2:75-76).

In addition to the unproblematic rendering of the events, one can note the forcefulness of the verbs employed, the sense of property attached to the word "masters" assigned to English (not British) power, and the seemingly inevitable "happy ending" closing this period of instability. In spite of this assertion, however, Browning could not ignore Hasting's subsequent infamous rule as first governor of India. In fact, Hasting's case provides an interesting example of how Browning tried to reconcile the acceptable image of the benevolent colonising influence with the reality of the oppression of Indian natives. Extenuating circumstances were found to account for his violent government, as shown by the carefully balanced statement: "His government was on the whole, strong and wise, although in some matters he was harsh and positively cruel". What looks like an attempt to be fair and retrospectively impartial is yet tempered by an explanation trying to account for such a behaviour: "He was much opposed and thwarted by his subordinates" (*NHR* 7**:**63). The passage is imbued with the underlying stereotype of Asian cruelty and treachery, which I shall later study in depth. Let us just remark that Browning, in spite of a decided bias towards the Englishman, mentioned Hasting's trial—a variation on the theme of the restoration of order, implicitly proving the wisdom and justice of English rule. Here is how he presented it:

> It was found, upon inquiry, that Hastings during his arbitrary government had done harsh and cruel things, although he had undoubtedly saved our empire. He was eventually acquitted, but the trial showed that an Englishman will not suffer inferior races to be treated in a different manner to that in which they are treated themselves. (*NHR* 7:63)

Once again, one cannot fail to notice the binary rhetoric counterbalancing the potentially negative aspects of Hasting's rule—justifying them by nothing less than the rescue of the empire. Along the same vein, though following a different plot structure, one cannot fail to

mention General Gordon, whose death in Khartoum in 1884 after a one-year long siege owed him a widespread admiration among the British people, verging on a quasi-religious reverence. In the case of Gordon's death, one might truly talk of hagiographic accounts conferring to him not only the status of a hero, but that of a saint. Browning's position was no different from the norm; calling Gordon "a man of heroic and saint-like proportion" (*NIHE* 4:298), recalling Lord Morley's appreciation of Gordon: "He was a hero of heroes. He was a soldier of infinite personal courage and daring, of striking military energy, initiative and resource" (*HMW* 4:361), finally ending up with a harsh criticism of Prime Minister Gladstone, who had failed to rescue such a man: "The death of Gordon remains an indelible stain on the liberal Government of 1880" (*HMW* 4:364). In using a term so imbued with religious undertones (the "stain" that distinguishes the pure from the impure), Browning's writings fed on the religious devotion that surrounded Gordon immediately after his death. Popular images and portraits of the man often accompanied the accounts,[94] rendering with a vivid acuity the last dramatic hours of the hero. In Gordon could indeed be portrayed a new Christ-like figure, in his story a new kind of imperial "romance" through which Gordon's sacrificial death permitted "the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness" (White, *Metahistory* 8). And indeed, Browning concluded his quasi-eulogy by acknowledging the symbolic legacy of Gordon's sacrifice: a new kind of salvation, the victory of modern civilization over the forces of ignorance: "Gordon University at Khartoum provided for the *enlightenment* of one of the *darkest* spots in the *Dark Continent*" (my emphasis—*HMW* 4:432). Through all those examples, abstract values such as duty, justice, responsibility, and the general set of imperial standards were incarnated and dramatized, rendered much more appealing through "biographies, graphic stories of interesting events" (Collar and Crook 187) to the imagination of impressionable young pupils, but also to the mind of the general public, eager to be both entertained and educated.

Depicting the colonial "Other"

The narratives that so proudly staged a handful of English heroes acquiring and pacifying new lands in the name of the mother country ambiguously left very little room for those who had previously lived there. In fact, the imperial conquest as narrated by Browning seemed to have happened as if Raleigh and the like had landed on virgin, pristine lands, barely inhabited by anybody—lands for the taking that could be contested by other European powers, such as France, but certainly not by the natives themselves. In "The Growth of the British Empire"

94 See illustration 8 in the appendix.

(*NHR* 7:179), Browning's explanations indeed blandly omitted to talk about the first inhabitants of England's foreign possessions, which had been "acquired in various ways": "some have been taken in war, others have been purchased, some have been ceded to the British crown, while others again have come to us by settlement" (181). As for India, the territory had been

> visited by merchants who saw in the vast resource of that great Empire unlimited opportunity for developing the trade of England in that quarter of the world. (182-183)

It is worth noting Browning's incidental acknowledgement of previous power and cultural structures ("that great Empire"), but without him lingering upon it: rather, the focus is much clearly directed upon the set of circumstances favourable to English investment and settlement. When natives did contest British rule, such unexpected upheavals were deemed unnatural, ungrateful as regards the benevolent English rule, and as such, required to be duly subdued. But apart from those moments of crisis, native people went largely unmentioned—an omission that was in itself an admission of their insignificance in the eyes of the historian, and more largely, of the great majority. Because they crystallised attention when questioning the validity of British rule, or when claiming their autonomy, native people were often portrayed as unruly, irrational beings—a stage near that of childhood, necessitating the paternal, wise guidance of their English "masters". Some instances of such a rhetoric might enable us to exemplify its workings. The so-called Indian Mutiny, which erupted in 1857 after the rebellion of some sepoys (Indian soldiers), featured prominently in every school readers and popular history because of its traumatizing impact on England. Sparkled by a religious quarrel (the sepoys refused to use cartridges that were rumoured to be greased with beef and pork, both offensive to Hindus and Muslims), the rebellion flaunted a more widespread racial misunderstanding and exposed the failure of British colonisation (Chakravarty 4). However, such explanations were totally dismissed in the accounts of the mutiny, which treated it as a result of the natives' immature and excitable character, as well as backwardness and ignorance.

> Many other changes, merely the inevitable result of civilisation, were hateful to the Hindus. Schools had been opened to all children irrespective of caste, suttee abolished, and slavery put down; the same laws were applied to the highest and lowest; while telegraphs and railways were regarded as the works of sorcery and magic. All these things had worked upon the native mind, and the story of the greased cartridges fell like a spark on inflammable material. (*HMW* 2:431-432)

Not only are the native people depicted as irrational individuals, but also still in an early primitive stage on a pseudo-anthropological level, suspicious of the benefits of civilisation,

material progress and technology that England had brought to them, prone to passionate and inordinate reactions. The undertone of superiority could not be made clearer. Similarly, leaving the episode of the Indian Mutiny for him to recount in the seventh volume of the *Newbery Historical Readers*, the most advanced reader of the set, Browning produced a small but striking account of the event, declaring that

> The rebellion showed us how precarious our power in the country was, and how the small handful of white men could be overpowered by the huge mass of our black subjects. (98)

Several elements need to be highlighted in this short description. First, the use of pronouns that overwhelmingly hinges around "us" and the possessive "our", creates a sense of collusion and community of interest with his readers. Even the humblest of pupils could talk with right about "his country's" rule on inferior subjects, for such was the hierarchy and rule of difference at play in the imperial context. The skilful binary opposition between the "small handful of white men" and the "huge mass of our black subjects' then subtly revives the image of the irrational, unleashed crowd of mutineers—a mob as much feared at home as it was in the colonies—at odds with the small number of worthy white men. The mention of the skin colour is also an interesting one, for it is a rare occurrence in all the books by Browning. The conflict here appears also to be a racial confrontation, a shocking overthrow of the status and authority so far conferred to the English "masters". In this reversed world where the former powerless masses had taken power, sound hierarchies and the right order of things were impudently shattered, giving free rein to the most horrific deeds and unleashing underlying fears among the previous rulers. Rather than accounting for the causes of the rebellion, narratives of the Indian Mutiny indeed focused around a particular set of images, all characterised by their extreme violence, as well as by the natives' treachery and ferocity:

> The black troops refused to obey their officers . . . besieged their masters with their wives and children . . . Native servants turned against their employers and tender women and children fled to the jungle. (*NHR* 7:98)

> A wide-spread rebellion of native soldier had broken out in the country, accompanied by atrocities such as English men and women had never suffered before . . . A black cloud of mutineers retook Cawpore, but they were entirely defeated in the field. (*Modern England* 44)

> The mutinous soldiers, the scum of the population, and the released prisoners were masters of the situation. The authorities were paralysed by the shock and did nothing effective. Bungalows were burnt, wives left unprotected by their husbands were butchered, children were slaughtered under the eyes of their mothers. (*HMW* 2:433)

> Europeans and Eurasians were mutilated, tortured and killed, and the treasury was sacked. (*HMW* 2:436)

The recurring emphasis on the ordeal of women carries an important symbolic weight: for a late-Victorian and an Edwardian audience, such assaults underscored latent fears about racial purity and sexual violation, while the depicted martyr of helpless children obviously aroused pathos and the ensuing feelings of indignation and calls for vengeance. The rebellion struck at the heart of the values upheld by the colonial and patriarchal society, most violently questionning Britain's masculine potency and ability to protect the innocent, pure ones (Dawson 91-92). "Burnt", "butchered", "slaughtered", "mutilated", "tortured", "killed": one may notice that the most violent verbs are used in a textbook destined to an audience older than that of historical readers. In the latter, though the depiction uses similar rhetorical tools (the evocation of "tender" women and children to trigger empathy and pity), it is altogether less overtly violent than the ten-page long descriptions to be found in *The New Illustrated History of England*. As Peter Yeandle argues, such a different treatment was due to "different pedagogical approaches" according to which reading books "treated Africans and Asians as immature, that is, akin to the early English at the onset of their path towards 'civilisation'" while textbooks "invoked the language of irredeemable barbarism and savagery" (*Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 98). Other instances yet provided readers with occasions to demonstrate foreign barbarity, as the story of Cook's death in Australia powerfully exemplifies:

> The people who lived on these islands were very cruel, and often killed and ate each other. Once, when Captain Cook and his sailors had landed to get some fresh water, the natives came down to the beach and watched them. They had never seen a white man before . . . The sight of the ships filled them with anger, for they thought the white men had come to take their lands from them.
>
> As he [Cook] was getting into his boat, one of the natives came behind him and killed him with his spear. (*NHR* 2:83-84)

The passage is worth studying for it is one of the few that depicts the moment of contact between the two peoples; an initial scene meant to govern and dictate the nature of the subsequent encounters and intercourse between the coloniser and the colonised. It could be taken as a compendium of natives' attitudes: typified by their cruelty and inexorable estrangement from humanity—in what appears to be a pre-edenic world, they are strange man-eaters that know nothing of Christian values, live in sin and are alienated to the hope of redemption—they also possess the other characteristics that were constantly associated with the colonial "other": primitivism, irrationality, brutality, treachery (note how Cook's murderer "came behind him"), and foolish anger. Additionally, as with the "huge mass of black people" of the Indian Mutiny, the natives remain an undifferentiated crowd of people easily governed by its most intrinsic drives, indifferent to calls of reason. In such a tightly structured narrative,

little or no room was left for sympathetic impulse towards the natives. Fixed and "essentialized" as the counter-image of the civilized English nation, the colonised people seemed to replicate the very same features no matter how different the contexts and locations were. Indians, Aboriginals, African and Afghan tribes: all got entangled in the meshes of those stereotypical, essentialist depictions that consistently contrasted the primitive to the civilized:

> The war [the Zulu war], the incidents of which we now have to relate, sprang out of *the endless conflict between barbarous and civilized races* which is always going on. (my emphasis—*HMW* 4:322)
>
> [On speaking about Egypt] But *the East is the land of surprises*, and it is difficult for Western rulers to understand or to divine what is passing in *the Eastern nature*. (my emphasis—*HMW* 4:349)
>
> The Afghans, *excited by some wild rumours* rose against him [General Sale], cut off his provisions, *killed* the British envoy *by treachery*, and compelled the army to *shameful* capitulation. No faith was kept by the *barbarians*. Deprived of food, harassed by *treacherous attacks*, the army dwindled away to a mere handful. The women and children had to be surrendered to *the faithless enemy*. (my emphasis—*Modern England* 33)

All the underscored occurrences are extremely similar to the process thanks to which the West came to domesticate and circumscribe the East's irredeemable alterity (Said 12). For the colonised represented a threat that needed to be contained: the fear that oriental characteristics, such as cruelty, femininity, irrationality, could pervade English values. This was what already seemed to appear in the description of Hasting's rule in India: "he was harsh and positively cruel. He was much opposed and thwarted by his subordinates" show the degree to which the corrupted atmosphere of Indian affairs were an impediment to sound and ordinate action. The overall picture of the colonised people in the British empire thus oscillated between two complementary poles: the infantile, primitive beings not yet accustomed to the achievements of progress and technology embodied by England, and at the same time, the undifferentiated individuals prone to rash, cruel actions unfathomable for Western reason. One slight exception to this overall view can be found in Browning's account of the Zulu wars, in a detailed chapter of his *History of the Modern World*, in which he imparted quite an important amount of space to the depiction of Zulu history and language, under quite a favourable light:

> The Zulus are a very attractive people. Their language closely resembles Kafir, but is more musical and more refined. It is spoken by many English men and women, and is used for religious purposes by many missionaries. (4:322)

In this discussion of language, one cannot fail to think of the etymological origin of "barbarism", from the Greek term primarily referring to a stammering and unintelligible

speech. In what could be compared to an evolutionary scale of racial worth,[95] Browning placed the Zulus higher than any other native tribe, for he saw them as akin to the early Europeans at the start of their march towards civilisation:

> [On Chaka, a prominent Zulu king] He was a great administrator like Charles the Great on a small scale, comparable to those heroes whom we are taught to admire in the dawn of European history. (4:323)

The Zulus were thus granted a special treatment because they were thought to be more evolved than their African or Asian counterparts, and because of the valour of their warriors, who unexpectedly stood up to the British army. However Browning did not go further than depicting the Zulu tribe in the light of Western values and history, judging this culture in terms that were imbued with his own categories of judgement. The attempt to understand alterity failed, only to be reduced to a diffracted mirror image of his Western standards. Moreover, in spite of "being so evolved", the Zulus kept some of their fundamental savagery, as shown by Browning's following condescending comment:

> Cetewayo reigned well, but it could be hardly expected of him that he should be entirely devoid of cruelty. (4:323)

All those characteristics led to the very same conclusion: the need for England to provide the best guidance, to cater for the needs and to educate the native people along its own Christian, western principles. When faced with native savagery, the story of the Empire ultimately celebrated the effects of England's colonisation and settlement.

A restoration of order, peace and justice?

In spite of neglecting to clarify the cause of the Indian Mutiny, Browning was forced to account for the aftermath of one of the most traumatizing events in England's imperial history. He remained nonetheless extremely wary of expressing any trenchant opinion upon the event, delivering a bland general statement that hardly concealed the trauma caused by the rebellion: "Our country received a severe lesson from the shock of this calamity. Among its principal effects were the transference of the government of India from the East India Company to the Crown and the awakening of Englishmen to a deeper interest in Indian affairs" (*Modern England* 45). However, as far as India was concerned, a figure in particular enabled Browning to try to bridge the unbearable division that the mutiny had let appear between England and its colony: Queen Victoria, Empress of India since 1877. Inevitably, those of his readers and

95 N. Stepan actually argues that by the 1860s, the use of gradation and of "the concept of the great chain [of being] for racialist purposes" (9) had gained particular prominence in intellectual (be they scientific, historical, literary) circles, infused by the belief in racial types and racial inequality (110).

textbooks written after 1887 mentioned one or both of Victoria's two Jubilees (1887 and 1897), while hailing the 1851 great exhibition as a "landmark of civilisation" (*HMW* 2:363). The second volume of the *Newbery Historical Readers* gave pride of place to the Queen in its ultimate chapter, closely associating her to the glory of the present "English Empire" (103). Escaping the blame for the failures of England's colonial policy—such as Gordon's death—Victoria and her two jubilees contributed to revive the imperial spirit in bringing together, during festive celebrations, all parts of the Empire. In fact, those festive gatherings could be compared to the reconciliation that traditionally concludes the comic plot, bringing a sense of renewed social stability and a happy closure to a previous series of disruptive events. In England's case, those were opportunities for the body politic to regenerate itself and to symbolically transcend differences and distance. It is worth quoting Browning's accounts of them here:

> [On the 1887 Jubilee] Festivities were held in every part of England, Scotland and Ireland, in all the capitals of Europe, in the US, in India, Canada, Australasia, and the colonies . . . The popular joy was an expression … of deep respect and affection for the gracious lady who had for so many years worn the crown and welded the sceptre of that vast dominion which encircles the globe like a girdle and over which the sun never sets. (*NIHE* 4:304)
>
> [On the Diamond Jubilee] The Jubilee celebrations, indeed, constituted the high-water mark of Colonial loyalty and of the manifestation of the qualities and the unity of the Empire. (*HMW* 4:489)

That the British monarchy came to be so closely associated with the Empire was relatively new at the end of the nineteenth century, as showed by David Cannadine: from 1877 onwards, "every great royal occasion was also an *imperial* occasion" (sic—124), as part of the set of new "invented traditions" that emerged to respond to the new social and economic developments in Britain. As seen in the texts, the monarch became a rallying figure and the symbol of British expansion, the living testimony of Britain's superiority and might, powerfully expressed by the old imperial creed according to which the sun never set upon the British Empire. Another simple and efficient way to bring out Britain's wise administration of its colonies was to contrast it to other colonisers' attitudes: the Dutch in South Africa for instance, to whom the British government was quite irritatingly confronted for the control of the land and resources. As an introduction to the cause of the Boer Wars, Browning thus presented the Dutch government as an intolerably arbitrary yoke:

> The colonists possessed freedom only in name, and their condition was such that they would have welcomed at any moment the arrival of a British fleet to rescue them from an intolerable tyranny. (*HMW* 4:447)

Such a depiction obviously appealed to the feelings of the "free-born Englishman". In Browning's own words, "British rule in the East means the establishment of civilisation in place of barbarism" (*HMW* 4:357). Such an assertion was consistently elaborated upon in his texts, primarily by demonstrating the good brought about by England's presence, as was the case in Egypt:

> Egypt was now completely civilised under British rule; the roads had been cleansed and extended; drainage of the land, which is as important as its irrigation, had been introduced; and the great barrage, situated a short distance below Cairo, had been repaired and rendered serviceable. (*HMW* 4:422)
>
> Strictly speaking, Egypt is not a British colony . . . But, through our guidance and protection, the country has quickly risen from bankruptcy to considerable prosperity . . . Britain, therefore, has a great claim on Egypt. (*PKEHR* 218)

In such cases, it needs to be noted that though Browning always stressed the material, technological advantages gained by the colonised countries, he never ventured to mention the process of acculturation that in some cases completely failed. He sometimes acknowledged those failures with an open frankness that showed, to a certain extent, his lucidity—but important as they are, these occurrences only appeared in his textbooks, not in the readers where the overall tone thoroughly remained that of positive appraisal. Browning directed a number of criticisms towards the way the colonies were administered, but in varied ambiguous ways, either calling for an assertion of British might, or regretting the effects of the colonisation, but never questioning imperialism as a whole:

> [About the Zulu wars] Such is the story of Isandhlwana. The British underrated the power of the Zulus, overrated the courage of their native allies, neglected the most obvious precautions . . . But the chief lesson to be derived from what happened was that *the war should never have been undertaken at all*. (my emphasis—*HMW* 4:330)
>
> What was to be done with Egypt, which had now so suddenly and unexpectedly fallen into British hands? . . . Great Britain made the serious mistake, which she is now expiating, of not assuming boldly the responsibility which circumstances had laid upon her, and of which she could not divest herself. (*HMW* 4:356-357)

An interesting instance of Browning's deploring the effect of British settlement was to be found about Australia's convicts' settlements:

> The wanton destruction of the natives in Tasmania is *a blot of civilisation*. They were naturally peaceable, harmless, and contented, and bore the cruelty of the barbarous criminals with exemplary patience . . . The process of extinction was pitiless. The convicts killed the natives from lust of blood, the settlers pursued them in self-defence, and the Government helped to destroy them from desire of territory. (my emphasis—*HMW* 4:408-409)

What cannot fail to strike an attentive reader is the reversal of the qualities that were so far

attributed to native people (cruelty, blood lust), here the preserve not only of the deported white convicts, but extended to the government in a general condemnation of British settlement and administration. Browning here did not mince his words and used a metaphor similar to the one with which he blamed Gordon's death: the image of the smear ("blot", "stain") tarnishing England's professed purity. Along the same vein, Browning often regretted the violent measures of counterinsurgency that took place after native rebellions:

> The attention of Englishmen was at this time much attracted by a rebellion which had broken out in Jamaica and the cruelty with which it was suppressed. (*NIHE* 4:262)

And perhaps even more strikingly, after the Indian Mutiny:

> Great as was the provocation, it may be doubted whether too wild and passionate a vengeance was not inflicted on the mutineers. Many of them were blown from guns, a death peculiarly horrible in their eyes. (*Modern England* 45)

Few as they are, those passages hint that Browning did not merely blandly endorse the imperialist standpoint and strove to make a place, up to a certain point, to an alternative viewpoint. Moreover, the episode that retrospectively incurred most of his reproaches was undoubtedly the infamous second Boer War, an unexpectedly long conflict during which Britain resorted to dishonourable war methods (the first concentration camps, or the scorched earth policy):

> The public feeling of the world was strongly against her, and reasonably so, for in contradiction to the lessons of her history, she [Britain] was unjustly oppressing a small nation, depriving it of its liberty and coveting a valuable territory which did not belong to her. (*HMW* 4:455)

Here again, whilst the values of justice, freedom and peace were normally those that England professed to bring to its colonies, in keeping with its own values ("in contradiction to the lessons of her history"), Browning seems to imply that the unjustified Boer War organised an abnormal reversal of standards, endowing Britain with the hateful characteristics of a coercive nation ("unjustly oppressing"). One should not forget here that Browning wrote the account some ten years after the end of the war, and that he ran tree times for the Liberals in 1886, 1892 and 1895—a political allegiance that accounted for his opposition to the war, here blatantly expressed. At Cambridge, Browning indeed made no secret of his pro-Boer positions.[96]

These instances, even if they represent only small parts in the overall account of England's empire, allow one to draw a qualified portrait of Browning and his writings. Though largely

96 "I remained a firm pro-Boer, especially at the Union" (Browning, *Memories of Later Years* 60). See also illustration 8 in the appendix.

imbued with the ideas of his time, among which the most blatant are his racial classifications, and his typically ethnocentric depictions of colonised peoples, Browning expressed run-of-the-mill, socially acceptable opinions that never verged on jingoism, as exemplified by Kipling and Fletcher's 1911 textbook *History of England*. Closely monitored by his publishers, perfectly aware of the prevailing historiographical doxa and well versed in the history of his country, he was able to produce marketable textbooks that could not be accused of containing any suspicious opinions, while permitting himself, in what would be one of his latest publications, *A History of the Modern World*, partisan remarks. However, his readers did not allow him the same amount of freedom; they remained uniformly laudatory and smoothed over the contradictions or difficulties encountered by British authorities overseas, by dint of simplification and omissions. The rationales at stake within readers for young pupils and textbooks for an older audience thus diverged quite clearly. This distinction helpfully prevents me from any dogmatic schematization of eaning. In the face of a given historical and social context, as Dennis Butts has cogently argued, "the writer often struggles with the world he or she sets out to depict. . . while some works undoubtedly do reflect their society … others articulate its contradictions, question its values, or even argue against them".[97] But in this investigation of the history text, it is now time to turn precisely towards the audience that received those texts.

III. Socialization and the construction of subjectivities

Education is but one way towards socialization, i.e. the more encompassing process of introduction in a given society with its codes and relevant attitudes; yet it is endowed with an agency that cannot be underestimated in the formation of early subjectivities. Elementary schooling in particular helped to shape the boundaries and self-consciousness of young pupils, who by learning how to read with readers written according to a peculiar conceptual frame, went on making sense about their world with the very same frame. In the case of readers, "children were not only learning the alphabet of the English language, they were also learning the alphabet of their presumed identity" (Heathorn 20)—and in such a class-divided environment as nineteenth-century Britain, identity also meant to know one's proper place in society: "the whole strength of the British system relied on its different sections' being complementary but apart" (Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* 118). This was sensible in elementary readers for working-class pupils that emphasized the value of obedient and law-abiding subjects, reverent to the institutions of his or her country, especially to the monarchy.

97 Qtd. in Paris (51).

There nevertheless remains the question of the effectiveness, transmission and reception of those prescriptions, which I shall now touch upon as a conclusion to this study.

Indoctrination or adjustment?

In his seminal study *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, Bernard Porter raised a handful of serious objections to the claim that nineteenth-century British educational system tried to inculcate imperialism, or even pride in the empire—objections that need to be confronted to the material under study to try to see if they invalidate the conclusions drawn so far. Because of Britain's extremely divisive class system, Porter argues, imagining that a "common culture" or some "common knowledge" of the empire was taught indifferently to the leading classes and the working class is simply irrelevant (118). Yet as previously demonstrated, social prescriptions included in elementary school readers were carefully tailored to fit the audience they targeted—this was the primary meaning of the "pedestal metaphor" that was developed in readers for elementary school children. If national unity was promoted in any way, it was done in the terms of the allegiance to an entity, "England", which, in history readers at least, was looming predominantly over every other concerns. In this matter I shall disagree with Bernard Porter, who discards imperialistic teaching on the ground that patriotism itself was deemed too "dangerous" and "idealistic" to be inculcated to the lower classes. Be as it may, patriotic feelings had their place in the curriculum—yet not in the crude, straightforward manner that it took in some rare occurrences, such as Kipling's *History of England*. As already remarked by Porter (119), the pedagogical culture of the time shied away from jingoistic demonstrations, that would not have made it through school boards' lists:

> Patriotism must also be free from narrowness, the same obligation which binds us to love our country also binds other people to love theirs. Hence the teacher should take care that the spirit of patriotism which is fostered in his lessons is a broad one, which, while impressing upon the pupil the need of defending the rights of his own country, leads him also to recognise its duties to other countries and to respect their rights. (Collar and Crook 184)

Collar and Crook's explanations precisely described what Peter Yeandle calls "enlightened patriotism" (*Citizenship, Nation, Empire* 20): an invitation to participate in the national cause cultivated by a deep emotional attachment to one's country, but ideally tempered by reason and the sense of one's proper place. The use of particular "root-metaphors", to take up again Mangan's phrase, served this very purpose: the maternal figure of the Queen and the string of images that tended to describe England in terms of an extended family, and its empire as its legacy, hooked the child's interest and constituted the foundation upon which subsequent

discourses could then pile up. However, contextualisation is key: as shown by the different case studies based on Browning's readers and textbooks, the empire did not loom over-predominantly over other concerns: contextually speaking, it was but an element of an overarching national narrative that aimed to create a feeling of belonging and social obedience. Knowledge about the empire was, especially in readers, everything but detailed—and as previously remarked, it was not even deemed to be a relevant criteria for a good "pass" during the examination. The "cast of the empire", as I have named it, with its heroes and villains, can be construed as being part of the attempt to build a collective identity that drew its strength from the opposition between "us" and "them". It is deeply meaningful to see how a man such as Browning actually silenced a great many of his views on India in his educational works—views which he expressed elsewhere[98] publicly. Among those opinions, the conviction of the righteousness of English's missionary mission, the entire rejection of self-government for India or the adoption of a parochial Anglocentric gaze on Indian traditions (the system of castes, their supposedly lack of culture and refinement, encounters with native people that enhanced Britain's perfect administration) much more resembled the ethnographic curiosity and orientalist attitude described by Edward Said[99] than what could be found in his pedagogical material. Browning remained consistent, however, in both types of accounts, in upholding the superiority of the Anglo-saxon "race"—simply, his textbooks and readers did not linger more than necessary on Britain's colonies, for the simple reason that their purpose was different. This is precisely the type of adjustments that counterbalanced an allegedly all-powerful imperialist "propaganda". Symbolical elements, characters and institutions were all mobilised to form the thread of a general pattern encouraging duty and righteous action. Imagining what Englishness was like, and how its characteristics were passed from past generations to the present ones, encompassed and explained the state of modern Britain in a clear and accessible language. To smooth over any possible contradiction with what the pupils, especially working-class children, could experience in their everyday lives, Browning's texts kept on extolling an idealized vision of social concord that depended on the pupils' willingness to take on gendered, and for boys, on masculinised obligations.

In that sense, the importance attached by John MacKenzie to imperialist "propaganda", defined as the "transmission of ideas and values from one person, or group of person, to

98 See his autobiographical account *Impressions of an Indian Travel*, published in 1903, in which he relates his visit to his former pupil, then viceroy of India, G. Curzon.

99 "It is a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts . . . it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world" (12).

another, with the specific intention of influencing the recipients' attitudes in such a way that the interests of its authors will be enhanced" ("Introduction" 4) may be qualified: first, by taking into account the relative importance of the empire *per se* in the content of textbooks and readers; second, by considering the agency of those who actually came into contact with those texts, be they teachers or pupils.

Implementing the curriculum

The element of historical distance, as well as the lack of any evidence concerning the way Browning's readers may have been used in classrooms, forbids me to make any definitive, trenchant statements about how those texts were received.[100] Arguably, the fact that knowledge was mediated by teachers before it even even reached the pupils accounts for the difficulty: Browning himself, as a tutor and experienced fellow, did not overlook their importance:

> I lay it down as an axiom that there can be no teaching of history without a lecture from the teacher and that any system which attempts to dispense with this cannot be considered as teaching at all. ("The Teaching of History in Schools" 6)

Educationists likewise stressed the need for teachers to make up for any school book's "deficiency", which "can only be supplied by vigorous oral teaching" (Fitch 85). No existing inquiry can tell us about the degree to which teachers subscribed to the ideological prescriptions underlying readers. One can only make conjectures based on working-class accounts that differed according to the experience of their authors:

> Teachers, fed on Seeley's imperialistic word *The Expansion of England*, and often great readers of Kipling, spelled out patriotism among us with a fervour that with some edged on the religious. (Roberts 112)

Conversely, C.H. Rolph's memories of his primary education, quoted by Jonathan Rose,[101] stressed the inadequacy of his education in history and geography:

> Never once, in my twelve years of schooling in various parts of London, did I come across a teacher or a textbook able (or perhaps permitted) to convey the fascination and excitement of those twin subjects, history and geography. They were twin bores: heavy-hearted subjects, dull, stripped of nearly all the magic and the human interest to be discovered years later in "adult education". The history lessons were, it seemed, judged to be sufficiently human if they were larded with fancy legends like Alfred and the Cakes, Bruce and the Spider, Canute and the tide, and Turnagain Whittington…

100 If the history of education overlaps so powerfully with the history of childhood as a category framed contextually by adult anxieties, fears and hopes, the history of children as real persons needs to be carefully studied as well. Having said that, one faces considerable methodological issues as to how to retrieve voices laden with such an ideological cluster (Maza).

101 Rose (164).

It is interesting to notice Rolph's rejection of the tales and legends that constituted the common stock of every young pupil in his or her first years of schooling—a retrospective contempt that can also be explained by the fact Rolph "self-educated" himself, later reading "Gibbon, Froude, Macaulay, Wells, Toynbee and the marvellous teams of scholars who compiled the Oxford and Cambridge Modern Histories" (*ibid.*)—an education which, far from being the rule, obviously constituted an achievement beyond the norms of his social class. Acknowledging Rolph's critical distance does not however entirely stymie the contention that first readings were, and still are, heavily influential on a character's formation.[102] Whether the content of readers was taught at face value or not by elementary schoolteachers also depended on their capacity to question this very content and the curriculum, a distance that the conditions of instruction at the end of the nineteenth century seldom permitted. Up to the first decades of the twentieth century, teacher training remained extremely lacking—most of them were trained in the classrooms themselves,[103] following the pupil-teacher system, while their own living conditions very much resembled those of their pupils:

> Disseminators among the poor of bourgeois morals, culture and learning, they [teachers] remained economically tied to the lower orders, living in genteel poverty with an income little higher than that of the skilled manual worker. (Roberts 104)

Added to the squalid conditions of teaching they were forced to face,[104] the amount of liberty and agency that was required to suggest an alternative to the curriculum seemed to be clearly reduced; yet the possibility remained. As Michael Apple most cogently argues,

> We cannot assume that what is "in" the text is actually taught. Nor can we assume that what is taught is actually learned. Teachers have a long history of mediating and transforming text material when they employ it in classrooms. (7)

The argument was taken on and furthered by Bernard Porter, who pointed out that

> Teachers, whatever their politics, valued their professional integrity too much to be told what to teach, except in the broadest terms. Governments did not dare prescribe the *content* [sic] of syllabuses, or particular books. (*Absent-Minded Imperialists* 202)

Such a caution from the state is indeed proved by the codes issued by the education

---

102 It was remarked upon by George Orwell: "the worst books are often the most important because they are usually the ones that we read earliest in life. It is probable that many people who would consider themselves extremely sophisticated and 'advanced' are actually carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood" (qtd. in Paris, 9).

103 See Curtis: "The students had been scholars in elementary schools, had taught in them as pupil-teachers and then completed their teaching practice in the same type of school, lived in company with others who had the same limited experience, and spent the rest of their lives in the elementary-school environment" (287-288).

104 See Matthew Arnold's *Reports on Elementary Schools,* and especially his "General Report for the Year 1867": "I find in them [in English schools], in general, if I compare them with their former selves, a deadness, a slackness, and a discouragement which are not the signs and accompaniments of progress" (110).

department, and their relative vagueness as regards the kind of history to be taught—the decision as to the content was left to educationists, authors, publishers, and eventually teachers who were the ultimate targets, and hence also the ideal readers that texts projected. Turning now to the pupils themselves, the difficulty seems even greater. Fewer are the accounts of working-class children having been educated during those years, and in the pages of the few that exist, one immediately notes how attitudes varied greatly depending on the author's family background, experience, encounters, and life in a particular setting (rural or urban). Picking up one example at the expense of another would amount to simplifying and schematizing the complexity of a reader's response to a text. Let it just be remarked that some aspects of the national narrative, notably its emphasis on masculinized values, had no doubt much appeal to a working-class culture which was itself strongly steeped in gender divisions and in the assertion of virility (Humphries 41). In other words, to be transmitted and accepted with less reluctance by the lower classes, the dominant culture managed to tailor its message to their culture. As Tony Benett notes:

> Such processes neither erase the cultures of subordinate groups, nor do they rob "the people" of their "true culture": what they do do is shuffle those cultures on to an ideological and cultural terrain in which they can be disconnected from whatever radical impulses which may (but need not) have fuelled them and be connected to more conservative or, often, downright reactionary cultural and ideological tendencies. (qtd. by Apple 8)

As suggested, among others, by Michael Paris and Graham Dawson,[105] the construction of the martial imagery of masculinity was deeply embedded in late Victorian and early Edwardian culture, especially in children's leisure activities, as demonstrated by the flourishing of boys' papers and popular stories (Boyd 176). Those media sought to transform tendencies towards radicalism into a conservative and martial defence of national values: such was the rationale behind countless works of fiction, as well as behind many of Browning's texts, either in a conscious, or unconscious manner. Whether this was achieved successfully or not, remained a conundrum beyond our grasp—even if some might suggest the success of the First World War mobilisation among the working class may have been prepared on the benches of the late Victorian and Edwardian elementary schools.

105 See respectively *Warrior Nation* (2000) and *Soldier Heroes* (1994).

Conclusion

My initial purpose was to explore the way Oscar Browning's popular historical works accounted for the past of Great Britain as well as its empire. I endeavoured to demonstrate that far from being the work of a single man, the writing of those pedagogical materials depended upon an intricate network of compromises and struggles for influence and cultural authority. I chose to start with the social and political *Zeitgeist* of the end of the nineteenth century and gradually expanded on its influence over educational experiments, developments and aims. Through the prism of Oscar Browning, I came to analyse the motives behind the production of legitimate knowledge directed at elementary school pupils, showing its multifarious, sometimes colliding aspects. Intending to display how those preoccupations reflected on the content of the texts, I opted for a last chapter on how the past of the English nation was defined, told, and possibly received by teachers and pupils.

The end of the nineteenth century marked both the apex and decline of Britain's self confidence, which translated in growing fears about the maintenance of its world supremacy and about its internal social cohesion. As the working class gradually gained new political rights and elementary education, its instruction became an urgent preoccupation of the state, informed by a mixture of social norms and political constructs. Just as working-class children were shaped into being model citizens, some disciplines, such as history, were shaped into transmitting moral as well as patriotic values. The study of history brought me to focus on the epistemological distinction between popular accounts of the past and those directed at a more cultivated elite of connoisseurs, from which sprung Browning.

The principles at the root of pedagogical materials were diversely interpreted by their producers: through the analysis of Browning's relations with his publishers and editors, I have sought to identify the various ways in which his manuscripts were monitored and amended, before their actual publication. In an expanding market that nevertheless saw the predominance of certain educational publishers, the dire struggle to attract consumers led to a general standardisation of the output, leaving little space for authorial agency. Poised between his dependence on the revenues generated by his popular writings, and his belonging to an academic world that dismissed such narratives, Browning was the living embodiment of a generation of new textbook authors closely linked to imperial exponents. His texts also provided me with the possibility to examine the mechanisms of popular history, hinging on

devices as various as myth-making and literary replication.

However, challenging the belief that nineteenth-century historical accounts were parts of a crude imperialistic propaganda, the study of the historical subject matter itself rather showed a thorough ideological construction whose focus was primarily the superiority of the English nation. While class was rarely, if ever, touched upon in those texts, race on the contrary was the great keyword of this discourse. I have tried to show that it led to the promotion of ancestry as a creating moral obligations for the future, and to the establishment of a cast that mirrored gender and racial constructs, using the unproblematic narrative pattern of a national epic defined by martial achievements. Browning's texts thereby stayed on-message in terms of the rhetoric of his time, but one should bear in mind the distinction between his historical readers, and the textbooks he wrote for a senior audience. In the last ones, which were additionally published at the end of his career, some of his analyses were a far cry from the bland endorsements that could be found in the readers. However, it never amounted to the expression of outright deviant opinions, and I have sought to prove that it was due both to the close monitoring of his publishers, and arguably to self-censorship, the sense of the legitimacy of a discourse in a given culture. Eventually, refusing to leave an important part of the equation out of this study, I have attempted to sketch the responses those texts were likely to have triggered among pupils and teachers. Indeed, it needs to be recalled that

> L'éducation a beau être, de droit, l'instrument grâce auquel tout individu, dans une société comme la nôtre, peut avoir accès à n'importe quel type de discours, on sait bien qu'elle suit dans sa distribution, dans ce qu'elle permet et dans ce qu'elle empêche, les lignes qui sont marquées par les distances, les oppositions et les luttes sociales. Tout système d'éducation est une manière politique de maintenir ou de modifier l'appropriation des discours, avec les savoirs et les pouvoirs qu'ils emportent avec eux. . . Qu'est-ce, après tout, qu'un système d'enseignement, sinon une ritualisation de la parole ; sinon une qualification et une fixation des rôles pour les sujets parlants ; sinon la constitution d'un groupe doctrinal au moins diffus ; sinon une distribution et une appropriation du discours avec ses pouvoirs et ses savoirs ? (*L'ordre du discours* 45-47)

Michel Foucault cogently helps us to reflect more broadly on the core intellectual, as well as existential issue that this study modestly aimed to reflect. What I indeed want to highlight, to conclude this dissertation, is the deep import of educational materials that are constructed through the collusion of interests, be they ideological, pedagogical or material ones. Elementary instruction as it was conceived at the end of the nineteenth century for working-class children was far from being the instrument of emancipation that it later claimed to be—the knowledge it transmitted and the compliant attitudes it tried to inculcate were parts of a discourse that sought to exercise *pouvoir* on the working class by the means of *savoir*, fraught

with an ideology all the more difficult to subvert that early years of socialisation leave a lasting imprint on one's character and behaviour.

Jan. 18, 1884 The Publishers' Circular 33

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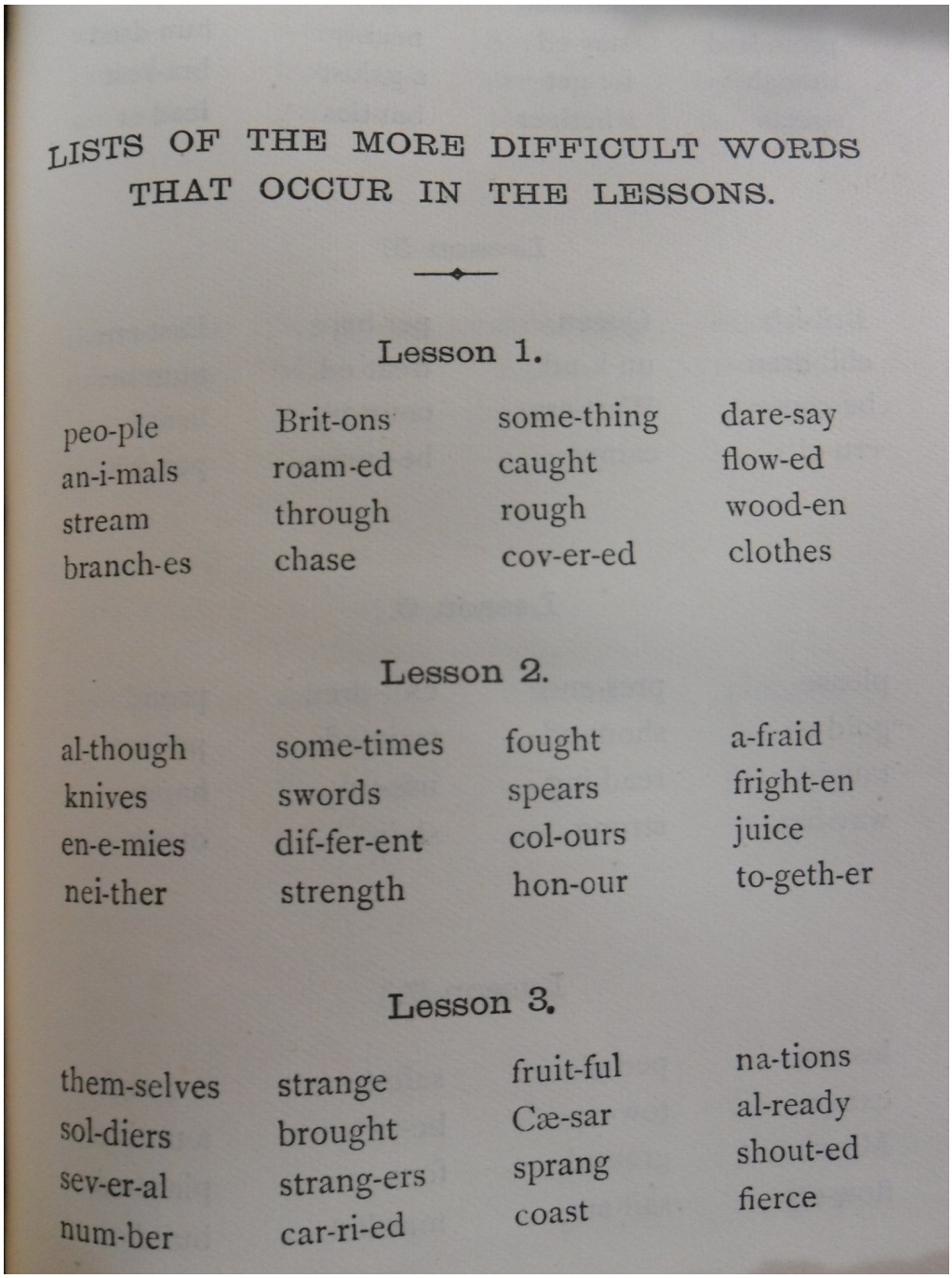
Illustration 2: Advertisement for Browning's *Historical Reading Books* in *The Publishers' Circular,* 47, 1112 (18 January 1884:33).



LISTS OF THE MORE DIFFICULT WORDS THAT OCCUR IN THE LESSONS.

Lesson 1.

peo-ple	Brit-ons	some-thing	dare-say
an-i-mals	roam-ed	caught	flow-ed
stream	through	rough	wood-en
branch-es	chase	cov-er-ed	clothes

Lesson 2.

al-though	some-times	fought	a-fraid
knives	swords	spears	fright-en
en-e-mies	dif-fer-ent	col-ours	juice
nei-ther	strength	hon-our	to-geth-er

Lesson 3.

them-selves	strange	fruit-ful	na-tions
sol-diers	brought	Cæ-sar	al-ready
sev-er-al	strang-ers	sprang	shout-ed
num-ber	car-ri-ed	coast	fierce

Illustration 3: "Lists of the More Difficult Words that Occur in the Lessons", *Historical Reader N°1*, 103 (London: Griffith, Farran and Co., 1893).

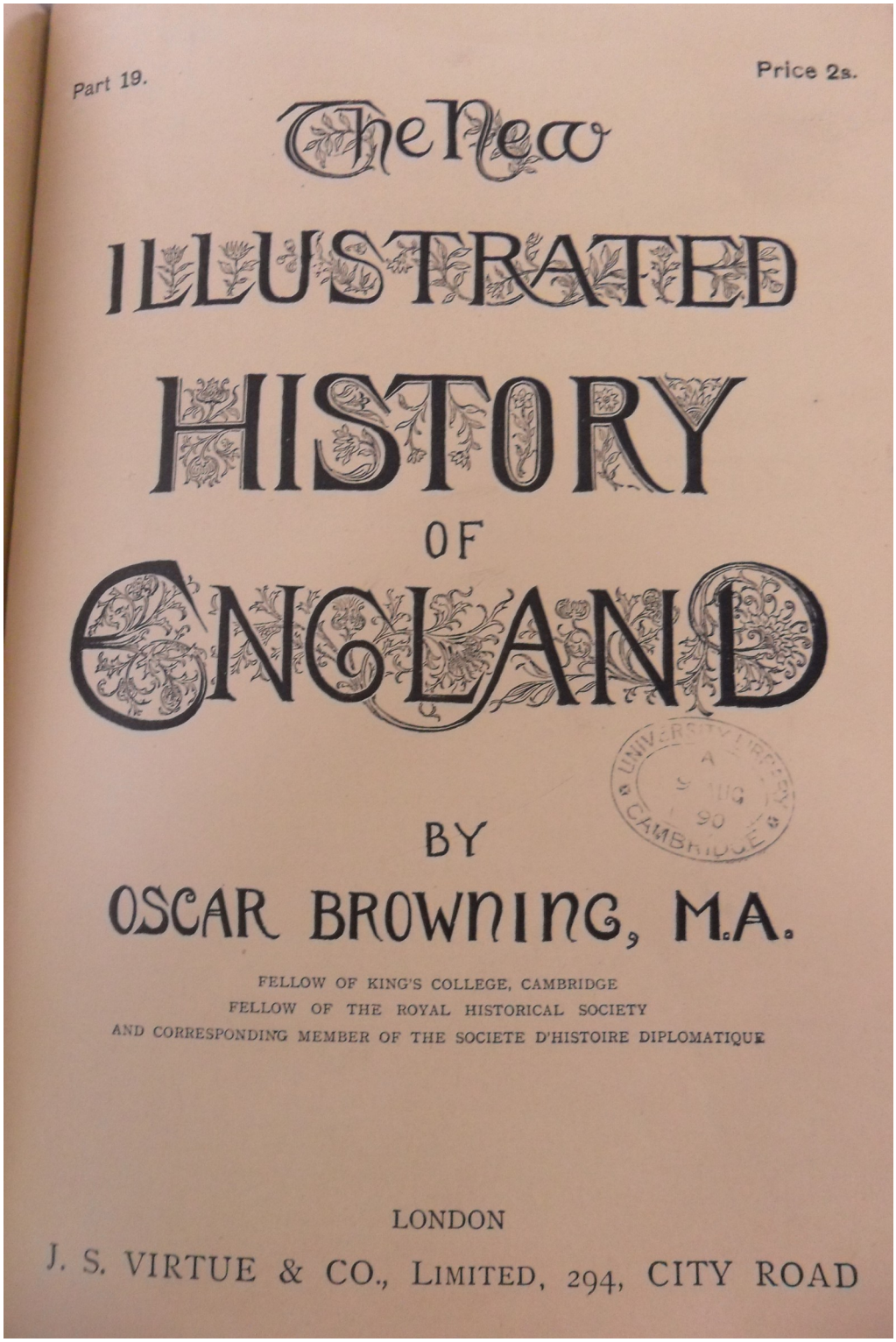
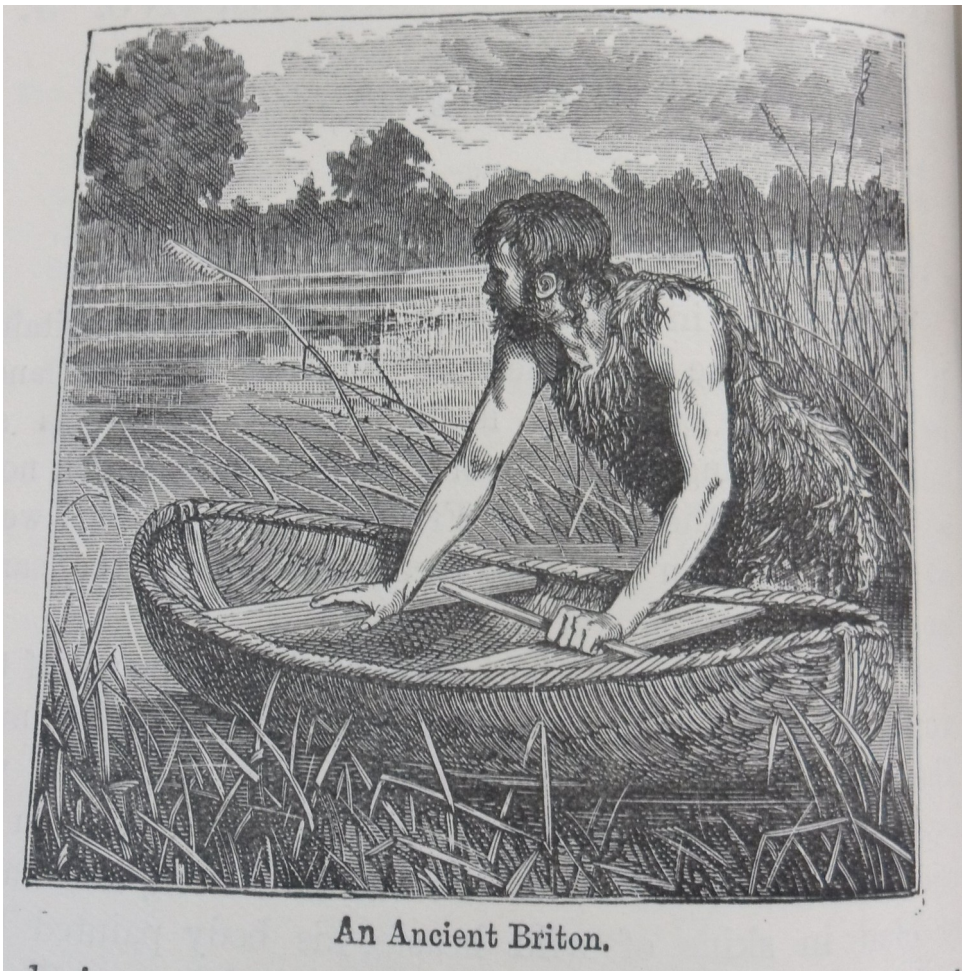


Illustration 4: Inside front-cover of *The New Illustrated History of England* (London: J. S. Virtue and Co., 1888).

PREFACE.

THE object of the author of this history has been to produce a popular work for the general reader, which at the same time is in accordance with the results of the latest research. While modern investigation has done away with many picturesque stories which embellished the histories of our childhood, it has also called up for us an England of the past which is more true, more vivid, and more impressive than the fabric of fancy which it has supplanted. There is probably no country in the world of which it is possible to write the history with such minuteness as that of England. Contemporary records of almost every event of

Illustration 5: Preface to *The New Illustrated History of England* (London: J. S. Virtue and Co.,1888).



An Ancient Briton.

Illustration 6: "An Ancient Briton", *Historical Reader N°3*, 12 (London: Griffith, Farran and Co., 1893).

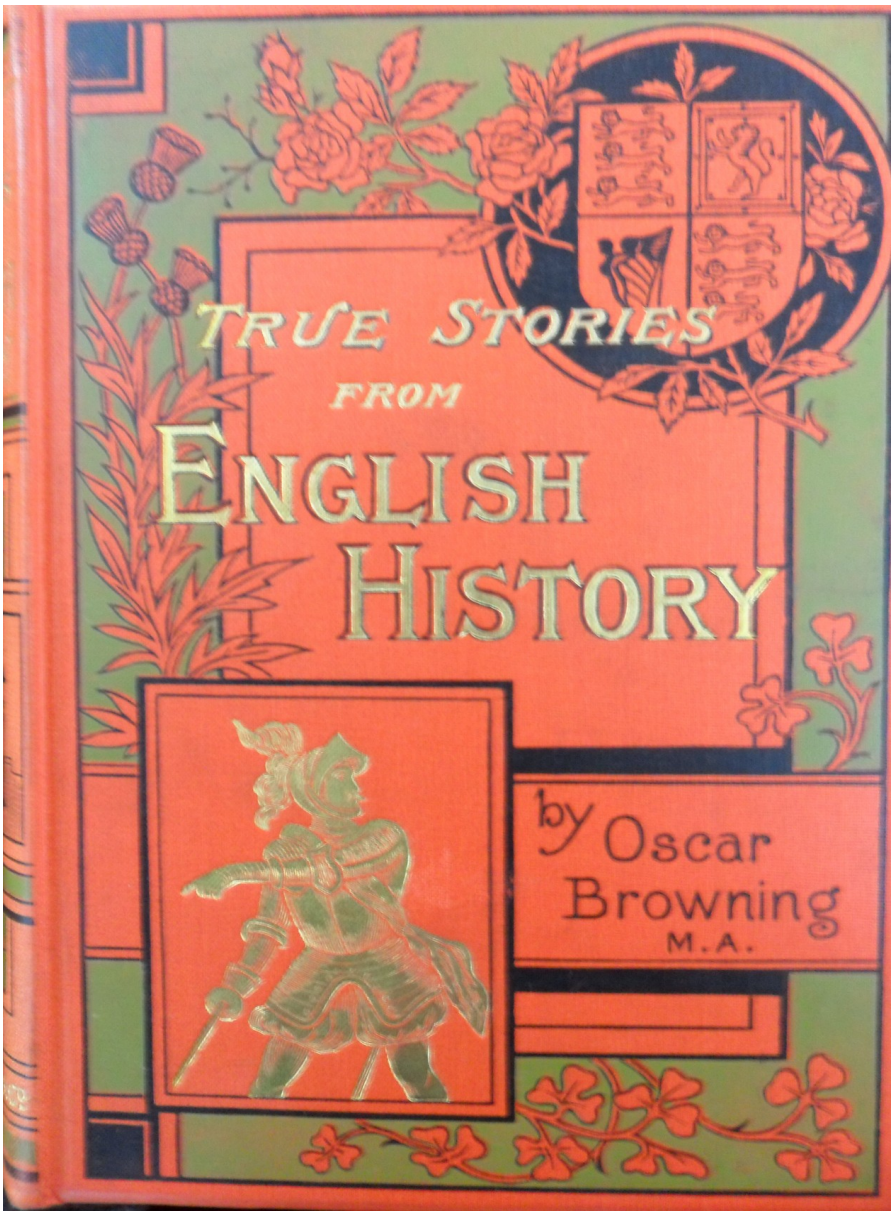


Illustration 7: Front-cover to *True Stories from English History* (London: Griffith and Farran, 1886).

Illustration 8: "Statue of General Gordon. By Hamo Thornycroft", *The New Illustrated History of England*, 4:299 (London: J. S Virtue and Co., 1888).

OFF TO THE FRONT!

(Mr. Oscar Browning is in Sympathy with the Boers.)

Illustration 9: "Off to the Front! (Mr. Oscar Browning is in Sympathy with the Boers)", *The Granta,* XIII, 267 (28 Oct. 1899, 427).

Table 1 – Copies Ordered by the Managers of about 3,800 Schools and the Number of Titles Recommended by the Council of Education between September 1856 and May 1859

	Titles on the Committee of Council's list	Copies ordered by schools
Reading lesson books	123	902,926
Arithmetic	55	135,323
Writing	4	1,277
Grammar and English language	59	104,974
British History	53	62,768
Wall Maps	72	14,369
School atlases	42	14,814

Source: Tilleard (4).[106]

Table 2 – Educational Books advertised in *The Publishers' Circular* from 1870 to 1899

Year	Number of titles	Overall Share in the Newspaper
1870	548	11,8%
1871	645	13,3%
1872	429	9,5%
1873	407	8,6%
1874	359	8,5%
1875	335	6,8%
1876	470	9,6%
1877	529	10,4%
1878	586	11,0%
1879	828	14,2%

106 I have selected what I deemed were the most relevant subjects for this dissertation, as well as some of the most recommended and purchased ones (school atlases and wall maps).

Table 2 – ***continued***

Year	Number of titles	Overall Share in the Newspaper
1880	675	11,8%
1881	682	12,6%
1882	525	10,2%
1883	691	11,2%
1884	683	10,7%
1885	652	11,6%
1886	572	11,0%
1887	684	11,9%
1888	779	11,8%
1889	681	11,2%
1890	703	12,3%
1891	694	12,2%
1892	694	11,1%
1893	622	9,7%
1894	742	11,4%
1895	771	11,8%
1896	643	9,8%
1897	928	11,7%
1898	921	12,3%
1899	990	13,1%

Source: Eliot (127-128).

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